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CONTESTING EUROPE ON TWITTER

SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE POLITICIZATION OF 'EUROPE' DURING THE SPANISH ELECTIONS, 2015 AND 2016

Doctoral Research Dissertation

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Contents

Introduction	1
CHAPTER I. Political contestation in the contemporary European Union: four lines of conflict	17
1.1. POLITICIZING EUROPE: FROM PERMISSIVE CONSENSUS TO CONSTRAINING DISSENSUS	18
1.1.1. POLITICIZATION: DEFINITION, MANIFESTATIONS AND FUNCTIONS	20
1.2. CONTESTING EUROPE: FOUR LINES OF CONFLICT	24
1.2.1. MARKET-MAKING VS. MARKET-CORRECTING: THE LEFT-RIGHT CLEAVAGE AT THE EU LEVEL	26
1.2.2. NORTH VS. SOUTH: THE FINANCIAL CRISIS AND THE EXACERBATION OF THE EXISTING CONFLICT BETWEEN EU ECONOMIC "CORE" AND "PERIPHERY"	31
1.2.3. WEST VS. EAST, OLD VS. NEW: THE EASTERN ENLARGEMENT AND THE FORMATION OF A NEW DIVIDE AMONG EU MEMBER STATES	36
1.2.4. NATIONAL SOCIAL SOVEREIGNTY VS. SUPRANATIONAL AUTHORITY: CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NATIONAL-SUPRANATIONAL DIVIDE	43
CHAPTER II. 30 years of Spain in the EU: History, Parties and Public Opinion (1986-2016)	51
2.1. THIRTY YEARS OF EU MEMBERSHIP: A BRIEF HISTORY	52
2.1.1. BEFORE ACCESSION (1977-1986)	52
2.1.2. NATIONAL REFORMS, STRUCTURAL FUNDS AND A PRO-FEDERALIST DISCOURSE: SPAIN AND THE EUROPEAN UNION UNDER GONZÁLEZ'S FIRST AND SECOND GOVERNMENTS (1986-1993)	55
2.1.3. FROM MAASTRICHT TO THE ECONOMIC CRISIS (1993-2008)	57
2.1.4. THE YEARS OF THE ECONOMIC CRISIS IN SPAIN (2008-2015)	61
2.2. EUROSCEPTICISM AND POLITICAL PARTIES IN SPAIN	71
2.2.1. PP AND PSOE: MAINSTREAM PARTIES	73
2.2.2. PODEMOS, CIUDADANOS AND THE END OF SPANISH BIPARTISANISM	77
2.2.3. PERIPHERAL PARTIES AND EUROSCEPTICISM IN SPAIN: THE CASE OF IZQUIERDA UNIDA (IU), THE PECULIARITY OF REGIONALIST PARTIES AND THE LACK OF FAR-RIGHT PARTIES	85
2.3. "IS THE EU A GOOD THING?" CITIZENS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE EU ACROSS TIME	89
2.3.1. A DISENCHANTED SUPPORT FOR THE EU? EVIDENCE FROM EUROBAROMETER LONGITUDINAL DATA	90
2.3.2. CONFLICTS OVER EUROPEAN INTEGRATION IN CONTEMPORARY SPAIN: RESULTS FROM THE 2016 RESCEU SURVEY	95
CHAPTER III. A Twitter-based Research Design to investigate EU Politicization	105
3.1. TWITTER AS A DATA SOURCE FOR POLITICAL RESEARCH	108
3.1.1. TWITTER: AN INTRODUCTION	108
3.1.2. STUDYING ELECTIONS WITH TWITTER DATA: FOUR MAIN APPROACHES	110
3.1.3. INSIGHTS FROM THE SPANISH TWITTERSPHERE	112
3.2. RESEARCH DESIGN	116
3.2.1. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES	117

CHAPTER IV. Politicizing Europe: Insights from the Spanish Political Elite **135**

4.1. INSTITUTIONAL FATIGUE, PUBLIC INDIGNATION AND A FOUR PARTY ELECTORAL SCENARIO: THE 2015 AND 2016 ELECTORAL CAMPAIGNS IN CONTEXT	135
4.1.1. THE 2015 ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN (4 DECEMBER - 20 DECEMBER 2015)	136
4.1.2. THE 2016 ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN (10 JUNE – 26 JUNE 2016)	139
4.2. POLITICIZING EUROPE? SALIENCE AND CONTENTIOUSNESS OF EU-RELATED ISSUES AMONGST THE SPANISH POLITICAL ELITE	143
4.2.1. SALIENCE	143
4.2.2. CONTENTIOUSNESS	154
4.3. ISSUE EMPHASIS AND EUROSCEPTICISM AMONGST THE SPANISH POLITICAL ELITE: TESTING THE INVERTED-U CURVE HYPOTHESIS	157
4.3.1. SELECTIVE ISSUE EMPHASIS	158
4.3.2. LEVELS OF CRITICISM TOWARDS THE EU	161
4.4 CRITICIZING EUROPE ON TWITTER: CALLING FOR A MORE SOCIAL AND SOLIDARIST EUROPEAN UNION	165
4.4.1. PSOE: SOCIAL EUROPE, BREXIT, AND THE SPECTRE OF POPULISM	166
4.4.2. PODEMOS, UNIDAD POPULAR AND UNIDOS PODEMOS: CLAIMS FOR A SOLIDARIST AND ANTI-AUSTERITY EUROPEAN UNION	175

CHAPTER V. Politicizing Europe: Insights From The Spanish Public(s) **185**

5.1. POLITICIZING EUROPE? SALIENCE AND CONTENTIOUSNESS OF EU-RELATED ISSUES AMONGST THE SPANISH PUBLIC(S)	185
5.1.1. SALIENCE	186
5.1.2. CONTENTIOUSNESS	189
5.2. CONTEXTUALIZING CRITICAL CITIZENS: A NETWORK ANALYSIS	192
5.2.1. INFERRING POLITICAL PARTISANSHIP FROM TWITTER DATA	192
5.2.2. INSIGHTS FROM 2015 AND 2016 RETWEET NETWORKS OF “CRITICAL CITIZENS”	194
5.2.3. SPANISH “LEAVERS” AND THE LACK OF FAR-RIGHT PARTIES: INSIGHTS FROM THE 2016 RESCEU SURVEY	198
5.3. IDENTIFYING CRITICAL ISSUES: AN ASSESSMENT OF OUR FOUR LINES OF CONFLICT	203
5.3.1. THE 2015 ELECTIONS: OPPOSING AUSTERITY AND EUROPEAN ECONOMIC ELITES	204
5.3.2. THE 2016 ELECTIONS: DIFFERENCES AND COMMONALITIES	207

Conclusion **215**

References **231**

Introduction

When the initial idea for this research originally emerged in early 2014, the European Parliament elections were at the gates. Expectations were high: as the sovereign-debt crisis saw the emergence of the EU and its institutions as key players in determining fiscal and economic policies affecting Euro member states, according to many observers the 2014 EP elections were going to represent a first, critical test to assess the response of European citizens to the decisions made in Brussels. As remarked by De Sio et al. (2014), the overall expectation was of “citizens becoming aware that what is decided in Brussels is not abstract, it is something with a strong and immediate impact on their real life”. If the 2014 EP elections were a key test, the EU did not perform too well: although the pro-European majority was not challenged, Eurosceptic parties almost doubled their seats compared to the 2009 elections and in some European countries – such as France and the United Kingdom - they affirmed themselves as the major political force in the European Parliament.

At the time of writing this introduction in March 2017, many things have changed and others are about to change. In Spain – the country at the core of this study - the success of Podemos in the 2015 general elections marked the end of the two-party system which had governed the country since the end of the Francoist era. This unprecedented result shook up the Spanish party system to the point that new general elections were called for June 2016, after five months of unsuccessful negotiations. In the United Kingdom, the referendum over EU membership held in May 2016 resulted in victory for the “Leave” front and, since then, news on negotiations over Britain’s exit from the EU populates the front pages of UK newspapers. At the time of writing, the Front National’s candidate Marine Le Pen is leading the polls for the upcoming French elections, and the recent Dutch elections had been followed Europe-wide and billed as a litmus test for euroscepticism in Europe, at least until the centre-right candidate Mark Rutte

finally won over anti-EU Geert Wilders.

The ‘politicization’ of European integration, which until a decade ago was seen as conspicuously absent, is thus now widely recognized: the EU is increasingly addressed by political parties, is a key concern for voters, and often the lead news item across the region (Statham & Trenz, 2015, p. 287). As the current events reported above suggest, the European Union is increasingly subject to regular critiques of its policy choices but also to more principled forms of opposition, which question not only its institutional and constitutional architecture but even the rationale for its existence (De Wilde, Michailidou & Trenz, 2013). Understanding the mechanisms behind such a process of politicization, its manifestations and its consequences has thus become a crucial research topic for political scientists. How do political actors conceive the basic alternatives? Can debates over European integration, despite their complexity, be reduced to a relatively small number of dimensions? Is there a substantial difference between citizens and political elites? How is contestation over European integration related to the left-right cleavage that has characterized political life in Western Europe over the past century or more? The importance of giving an appropriate answer to these questions goes beyond scholarly contribution: a more systematic and deeper understanding of the politicization of Europe would in fact also help practitioners and observers in making sense of current events and to gauge future trajectories in the area of European integration and European politics (Hoeglinger, 2016).

According to The Oxford Dictionary of the Social Sciences, ‘politicization’ can be defined as “a process through which certain issues become objects of public contention and debate, and are thereby legitimated as concerns of the state or political realm. Politicization is therefore generally a contentious process [...]” (Calhoun, 2002). In the on-going debate on European integration, the term has acquired two parallel meanings. On the one hand, EU politicization has often been seen as a negative trend, primarily referring to the general decline of public support for European integration and the rise of Eurosceptic positions (Hooghe & Marks, 2006; 2009). On the other hand, the increase in EU politicization also

indicates that the EU is maturing into a consolidated political system that facilitates citizens' interests and increases participation in European politics (De Wilde & Zürn, 2012; Statham & Trenz, 2013). Following this latter interpretation, the new polarization of opinions and interests that currently characterizes the European Union would thus be first and foremost driven by an increasing diffuse awareness among European citizens that the 'EU matters'. 'EU politicization' would thus entail not only "an increased level of resistance against the EU and its policies", but as well "an increased utilization of these political institutions by societal groups to achieve desired goals" (Statham & Trenz, 2013, p. 292).

Relying on the argument presented by Hutter, Grande and Kriesi (2016), our analysis focuses on the domestic level as it still represents the central arena for political mobilization, and national governments still constitute the most relevant actors in key decisions on European integration (Raunio, 2007; Schmidt, 2006). In addition to this reason, our interest in the domestic level is theoretically driven by the belief that the increasing politicisation of European integration is a result of the deepening interconnection of European decision processes and national political competition (Hooghe & Marks, 2009). We argue that the restructuring of political conflicts that has interested European integration since Maastricht onwards has been mainly driven by the exacerbation of existing tensions between nation-based welfare states (NBWS) and EU economic integration. With the burst of the sovereign-debt crisis, the original challenges posed by the EU to NBWS - through the prohibition of most cross-border restrictions regarding access to and consumption of social benefits (Ferrera, 2005), and the imposition of increasingly stringent fiscal rules to national budgets – have intensified, ultimately giving rise to four distinct lines of conflict that, as discussed in section 1.2, we expect to structure the debates over European integration (Ferrera, 2014a; 2014b).

The choice of Spain as an in-depth case study is well rooted in the theoretical framework outlined above. On the one hand, Spain can be included amongst the 'new' peripheral Southern European countries, being one of the European countries hit hardest by the economic recession and having received special EU financial assistance in 2012 in order to recapitalize its banks. As a

result of the economic crisis, Spain was also affected by an enormous rise in the unemployment rate, which remained stubbornly above 20% and was ranked at the time of the 2015 Spanish elections as the most important issue to face by a large majority of the interviewees (Standard EB 83, 2015). Considering that the intensity of the economic crisis and positive attitudes towards the EU are negatively correlated – between 2007 and 2013, the countries in which the view that EU membership is a ‘good thing’ has declined most are Spain (47%, -26 percentage points), Greece (34%, -21) and Portugal (36%, -19) (Eurobarometer 40 years, 2013) – we could expect Spain to be one of the countries in which the politicization of European integration is most likely to appear. On the other hand, Spanish parties and public opinion have traditionally been more supportive and enthusiastic with regard to European integration than most other European countries, as participation in the European project has been seen for a long time as a way to move the country towards better public policies and economic prosperity (Szmolka, 1999; Díez Medrano, 2003). Nevertheless, the traditional lack of party conflict over European integration has unwound since the 2014 European parliamentary elections, when a new left-wing party calling for a renegotiation of austerity measures and the redrafting of the Treaty of Lisbon asserted itself as the third political force in Spain. The further growth of Podemos’s electoral success, culminating in a 20.65% share of the votes in the 2015 Spanish general election, suggests that the anti-austerity claims for which the party is mouthpiece have gained ground amongst the public, thus constituting a second reason to consider Spain as a likely case in which EU politicization may occur. At the same time, the peculiar lack of right-wing Eurosceptic parties in Spain makes it an intriguing case for the understanding of public opinion dynamics over European integration.

Although the politicization of Europe is not restricted to the partisan arena, two additional reasons brought us to focus not only on the domestic arena but on *national elections* – namely, the 2015 and 2016 Spanish general elections - in particular. First, national elections constitute the most significant political events in modern representative democracies. In the study of EU politicization they thus offer important windows of opportunity where political conflicts amongst parties

can be observed in a condensed form (Hutter, Kriesi & Grande, 2016), since the politicization of any new political issue – if actually relevant – sooner or later becomes manifest in this setting (Hoeglinger, 2016). Second, in a national election campaign European integration competes with a potentially unlimited number of other pressing political issues. If, on the one hand, this sets very high stakes¹ for EU politicization to occur (Hutter, Kriesi & Grande 2016), it also allows us to put our findings into perspective by benchmarking the salience of European integration against other political issues (Hoeglinger, 2016).

Hence, coming to the operationalization of EU politicization, scholars agree that politicization is to be understood as a threefold process that necessarily comprises: (a) the increased salience of the issue in the public debate (*salience*), (b) a process of polarization amongst the political elites carrying the issue-specific debate (*contentiousness*) and (c) an expansion of the issue-specific conflict to the general public (expansion to the public) (Kriesi & Grande, 2014; De Wilde, 2011). Encompassing the three dimensions of EU politicization in a single research design has represented for a long time a non-trivial difficulty for scholars, as the data sources available - mass and elite surveys, party manifestos and news articles – have tended to constrain research agendas towards focusing mostly on either the political elite or the general public. In an attempt to overcome this limitation, we argue that social media data have opened up new, parallel avenues for politicization research. On the one hand, the Internet - and social media in particular - represents an unprecedented source of freely available, up-to-date data; on the other hand, the interactivity that characterizes Web 2.0 has enhanced two-way forms of communication, which potentially allow for the investigation of the three different facets of EU politicization.

As widely recognized, the potential of social media as a political communication platform became of public interest in the 2008 U.S. presidential

¹ This implies as well that if issues related to European integration become politicized during national election campaigns, the structuring capacity of this conflict can be regarded as significantly high (ibid.)

election, when some commentators claimed that Barack Obama's use of social media played a key role in his victory (Hendricks & Denton, 2010; Williams & Gulati, 2008). Since then, politicians' uses of social media – in terms of adoption rate, as well as of posting frequency and professionalism – has rapidly increased, thus opening up new avenues for political research. As a result of its public character and its specific affordances, Twitter has achieved particular relevance as a medium of political communication. Four main aspects are important: (a) posts are visible to every user by default; (b) content is easily sharable and can quickly spread across the network through the retweet function; (c) the system of #hashtags and @mentions allows the creation of ad hoc publics; and finally (d) users can follow a particular account without asking the permission of its owner (Colleoni, Rozza & Arvidsson, 2014).

Although the amount of studies focusing on the impact of Twitter on the different aspects of a country's political and electoral sphere is constantly and rapidly increasing, so far the potential of Twitter data for the investigation of attitudes and opinions on European integration has been exploited only to a limited extent (Bartlett et al., 2014; Ceron, Curini & Mainenti, 2015; Barisione & Michailidou, 2017). If the added value of relying on Twitter data might appear less pronounced with regard to the political elite – where sources such as party manifestos can allow for the parallel investigation of EU salience and contentiousness – social media analysis presents several advantages to investigate the salience and contentiousness of EU-related issues amongst the public(s). From Twitter huge amounts of data can be collected that have emerged as the result of citizens' will to freely express their opinions, and not as a reaction to pre-formulated questions as happens with surveys, thus allowing for a less biased understanding of the salience of European integration. As suggested by De Wilde (2011), whether an issue is politicized or not can in fact be indirectly assessed by studying the extent to which it is publicly debated. As Bartlett et al. argued (2014),

we have never before had access to the millions of voices that together form society's constant political debate, nor the possibility to listen to them. Capturing and listening to these citizen voices potentially offers a new way of listening to people, a transformative opportunity to understand what they think, and a crucial opportunity to close the democratic deficit.

Research questions and hypotheses

As discussed in the previous section, the literature on EU politicization suggests that since the beginning of the sovereign-debt crisis, EU-related issues have been increasingly politicized by media outlets, political parties and citizens in national arenas. At the same time, in their attempts to understand the patterns behind EU politicization, scholars have found citizens' and parties' attitudes and positions towards the issue of European integration is best described by the so-called 'inverted-U curve', which sees actors located at the extreme left or right of the political spectrum as the most willing to politicize EU-related issues. Considering the specificity of the Spanish context, the question arises whether and to what extent this pattern of EU politicization is confirmed in the Spanish case, given its curious specificity. It is a country with a long pro-European tradition, and with an 'anomalous' party system characterized by the absence of far right parties, but where at the same time the dramatic effects of austerity policies have produced an unprecedented fall in citizens' trust in and image of the EU. The situation is complicated further by the rise of the anti-austerity movement 15M and ultimately the break-down of the Spanish two-party system as a consequence of the electoral success of Podemos. Has European integration ultimately become a contentious issue also in Europhile Spain? Are social media interested in an increased salience of EU-related issues as much as previous studies have observed traditional media to have been? Does the absence of far-right parties affect the extent and modes of EU politicization in Spain? Which lesson can we ultimately learn from the analysis of the Spanish case for the advancement of our knowledge of the politicization of European integration? To

allow for a systematic test, in the Spanish case, of the hypotheses that have emerged from previous literature we have separated our broader research question into three separate *nuclei* of questions regarding the extent, the content and the actors we expect to drive EU politicization in the Spanish context.

Assessing the extent of EU politicization

First, we aim to assess to what extent EU-related issues have been politicized in the last two Spanish elections. Considering the socio-political characteristics of the Spanish context at the time of the two elections, we consider Spain as a likely case in which EU politicization may occur. Spain received special EU financial assistance in 2012 in order to recapitalize its banks, experienced a steep decline in the view that EU membership is a ‘good thing’ since the onset of the economic crisis and saw the recent electoral successes of Podemos -. Therefore, we expect EU-related issues to be politicized in the 2015 and 2016 Spanish elections, being salient and contentious amongst both the tweets sent by the Spanish political elite and those sent by the public(s). In order to gather an empirical base of data suitable for the investigation of all the three dimensions of politicization – salience, contentiousness and expansion to the public - throughout the whole 2015 and 2016 electoral campaigns² we collected (a) all tweets sent from the Twitter accounts of the candidates and representatives of the main Spanish parties³ and (b) all tweets sent from the general public to the listed accounts, including replies and retweets. The same collection criterion was also adopted by the Social Media Study 2014 carried out by the European Election Study (2014) in their first attempt to include social media data in their

² Electoral campaigns in Spain officially start two weeks before the election day. Therefore, we collected data from 4 December to 20 December 2015 (2015 Spanish general elections) and from 10 June to 26 June 2016 (2016 Spanish general elections).

³ For the purpose of this study we have included in our analysis five Spanish political parties: the four main political parties - the traditional centre-left (PSOE) and centre-right (PP) parties, and the new parties Podemos and Ciudadanos - and finally the extreme-left coalition Unidad Popular which, albeit being a minor force in terms of vote shares, is relevant for testing our hypotheses.

Elections' databases.⁴ This method has the main advantage of allowing for the investigation of the salience of EU-related issues, which could not be measured through other collection strategies, such as those based on keywords.

Category	Total number of tweets	
	4 December – 20 December 2015	10 June – 26 June 2016
From all parties	129,705	114,748
From citizens	2,678,895	1,846,843

Data collection: timeframe and frequencies

In order to test our expectations we first identified all tweets discussing EU-related issues, and second classified the identified tweets as being critical or supportive of the current state of European integration. Considering the amount of tweets collected – more than 4.5 million –, for our analysis we have employed a semi-supervised machine-learning approach based on the Natural Language Processing (NLP) software Method52.⁵ A long established sub-field of artificial intelligence research, NLP combines approaches developed in the fields of computer science, applied mathematics and linguistics, and in recent years has been increasingly used for automated social media analysis as it allows researchers to train algorithms to split and categorize Tweets on the basis of the text they contain.

Investigating the relationship between L-R positioning and EU politicization

Second, we are interested in understanding which actors are more willing to politicize EU-related issues. As is known, with regard to political competition European integration has for a long time been considered a 'sleeping giant' with "the potential, if awakened, to impel voters to political behavior that undercuts the bases for contemporary party mobilization in many, if not most, European polities"

⁴European Election Study (2014). 2014 Social Media Study.

⁵ Method52 is a web-hosted software platform, developed by technologists at the University of Sussex and CASM Consulting LLP. For more information see: <http://www.taglaboratory.org/>

(Van der Eijk & Franklin, 2004). Other studies have attempted to investigate the existence of specific patterns of party competition, analysing how contestation over European integration is related to the left-right cleavage that has characterized political life in Western Europe over the past century or more. In this regard, findings suggest the existence of an inverted-U curve describing pro-integration centrist parties and anti-integration peripheral parties (see Hooghe & Marks, 1999; Hooghe, Marks & Wilson, 2004 amongst many others). According to this view, parties at the extreme left and extreme right of the political spectrum tend to be more critical towards the EU, while parties in the middle, including most social democratic, Christian democratic, liberal, and conservative parties, are generally much more supportive of European integration.

Two reasons have been identified in order to explain the tendency of parties located at the left and right extremes to criticize the EU, namely: ideology and competition incentives. According to the ideological explanation, opposition to European integration is deeply entrenched among the radical left as the European Union is fundamentally inhospitable to radical left policy goals, its being primarily a market-liberal project mitigated by some measure of regulated capitalism. On the other hand, radical right parties by definition react against a series of perceived threats to the national community – identity, cultural heritage, social standards, practices - which the European Union poses. At the same time, if we look at the structure of incentives, parties at the extremes of the political spectrum are, at least initially, ‘unsuccessful parties’ i.e., parties with weak electoral support or that are locked out of government and which thus have an interest in restructuring contestation.

In contrast to most Western European countries Spain has no party representing the typical views of the populist radical right – such as rallying against immigration and multiculturalism, supporting welfare chauvinism and tending to be at odds with the process of European integration (Mudde, 2007). Although in Spain there are several parties that could fit such a definition, none of these parties has in fact obtained more than one per cent of the total Spanish vote in any national election since 1980 (Alonso & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2015).

In our work, we test the inverted-U curve hypothesis - more properly, a 'half inverted-U curve hypothesis', due to the lack of far-right parties – in the Spanish context. Considering that parties deliberately choose to emphasize those issues that are favourable to them and de-emphasize unfavourable ones (Budge & Farlie, 1983; Petrocik, 1996 amongst many others), we thus expect candidates of parties with extreme leftist ideological stances both to make more use of EU-related tweets and to be more critical towards the current state of European integration.

Furthermore, as regards the measuring of the extent of EU politicization, we identify all 'critical tweets' sent not only by the Spanish political elite, but also by its public. We use this new variable to investigate the political partisanship not only of critical leaders, but also of critical citizens. Differently from the previous steps, this latter task is pursued through the use of network analysis, a technique that allows us to explore the online interactional structure of critical citizens and to identify the partisan communities around which they are clustered. Finally, we rely on survey data to investigate the relationship between citizens' political self-placement and their voting intention in a possible referendum on Spain's EU membership, with the main intention of understanding whether the 'anomalous' absence of a Spanish populist radical right discourse is limited to the party-system or rather includes citizens' attitudes as well.

Identifying and contextualizing 'critical issues'

Once the extent to which EU-related issues are politicized has been assessed, and the political and societal actors that are more critical towards the EU identified, we could not conclude this work without providing an understanding of the critical issues in reason of which the EU is criticized. As mentioned before, we expect conflicts over European integration to be ultimately structured around four lines of conflict: (a) a left-right cleavage at the supranational level, opposing market-making and market-correcting policy preferences at the EU level (*market-making vs. market-correcting*); (b) a conflict opposing core and peripheral member states, and first and foremost payers and beneficiaries of cross-national transfers

(*core vs. periphery*); (c) a tension opposing free movement and national closure, most pressing with regard to the issue of intra-EU mobility between high-welfare and low-welfare member states (*free movement vs. national closure*); and finally (d) an integration-autonomy conflict, where the defence of national social sovereignty is in contrast with the increased role of EU conditionality (*integration vs. autonomy*). In this regard, we investigate to what extent the critical issues emerging in the online debate are ultimately ascribable to the four outlined lines of conflict. In particular, our expectation is that the first, second and fourth conflicts play an important role in shaping Spanish criticisms of European integration, while we have reason to believe that intra-EU mobility is not perceived at the moment as a core issue to address by either the Spanish political elite or by the Spanish public, also considering the lack of right-wing Eurosceptic parties.

To test our expectations, in the case of Spanish candidates and representatives, the number of EU-related tweets was such as to allow for manual qualitative content analysis, while with regard to Spanish citizens we have recreated a co-occurrence network of words in order to identify the EU-related issues most often associated with criticism towards European integration. Successfully used as an analysis technique since the early stages of content analysis (Osgood, 1959), word-to-word co-occurrence networks allow us to easily identify words with similar appearance patterns (connected by edges) and to further interpret the emerged co-occurrence structure.⁶

Scope and distinguishing features of this study

The aim of our work is accordingly threefold. Firstly, it provides a comprehensive understanding of the type, directionality and intensity of conflicts over European integration in present times in Spain, both at the level of the political elite and at that of the mass public. Secondly, it empirically verifies the assumptions and findings of the literature on EU politicization in relation to the

⁶ For the visualization of co-occurrence networks only we have employed the software KH coder, in which the computation of word location is based on the method developed by Fruchterman and Reingold (1991).

case under scrutiny. Thirdly, it introduces an innovative method for the study of issue politicization on Twitter-based communication that combines NLP technology, network analysis and qualitative content analysis. On the one hand, by using a combination of human coding and machine learning, we are able to separately analyse the three main components of EU politicization: salience, conflict, and expansion to the public (De Wilde & Zürn, 2012; Hutter & Kersch, 2014; Kriesi & Grande, 2014). On the other hand, once critical tweets are identified, the analysis of their textual content and networked structure allows us to identify the specific issues around which contestation towards European integration is rooted, thus allowing us to unpack the reasons that fostered and are still driving the mobilization of a wide range of actors.

Thesis outline

Chapter 1. Political contestation in the contemporary European Union: four lines of conflict

In Chapter 1 we present in detail the theoretical framework in which our work is rooted. In the first part of this chapter, we retrace the origins of the problematic relationship between citizens and European institutions, from their initial peaceful cohabitation until their post-Maastricht collision. We then introduce the concept of ‘politicization’, clarifying its origins and empirical definition, its manifestations in relation to European integration and finally its functions. In the second section of the chapter, we focus on the four specific lines of conflict that emerged as a result of the ‘clash’ between NBWS and economic integration, reconstructing the academic debate that has developed around them and their relevance for the interpretation of the current contentiousness around the European project.

Chapter 2. 30 years of Spain in the EU: History, Parties and Public Opinion (1986-2016)

In Chapter 2 we retrace the origins and evolution of the relationship between Spain and the EU since its accession 30 years ago. In the first section we reconstruct the history of the relationship, outlining the key moments and events that have happened from when Spain submitted its application for accession to the European Community (EEC) in 1962 until the present day, with a deeper focus on the years of the economic crisis (2008-2013). In the second section we focus on the Spanish political and party system. First, we present an historical overview of the Spanish mainstream parties – PP and PSOE - discussing the evolution of their positioning with regard to the issue of European integration. We then discuss the recent developments that have interested the Spanish party system, focusing on the origin and growth of two new parties – Podemos and Ciudadanos – who emerged in reaction to the Spanish economic and political crisis and, presenting themselves for the first time during the 2015 Spanish general elections, contributed with their electoral success to the end of Spanish two-party system. We conclude our presentation of the Spanish party system by discussing the positioning over European integration displayed by Spanish peripheral and regionalist parties, with a particular focus on the case of the United-Left (Izquierda Unida). In the third and final section of the chapter, we move our focus to Spanish citizens. We start our discussion on Spaniards' attitudes towards European integration by presenting the evolution of their preferences with regard to several Eurobarometer variables, such as trust and image of the EU, perceptions on country benefit from EU membership, attitudes towards the euro and views over exiting the EU. This illustrates the ways in which the crisis has affected and shaped citizens' opinions and feelings over European integration. After the presentation of longitudinal public opinion trends, we rely on the results of the recent RESceEU survey (2016)⁷ to depict the present situation in the light of the four lines of conflict discussed in Chapter 1.

⁷ For detailed information on the RESceEU survey see Ferrera, M. and Pellegata, A. (2017), *Can Economic and Social Europe Be Reconciled? Citizen Views on Integration and Solidarity*, report available at www.resceu.eu.

Chapter 3. A Twitter-based Research Design to investigate EU Politicization

In Chapter 3 we present our research design to investigate EU-politicization in national arenas on the basis of Twitter data. As mentioned, we believe that the diffusion of social media data has opened up new, parallel avenues for politicization research that allow for the simultaneous investigation of all the three facets of EU politicization – namely salience, contentiousness and expansion to the public. In the first section we introduce Twitter as a data source for political research, outlining the specific characteristics that make the medium particularly suitable for political communication and presenting a brief literature review regarding the main approaches adopted by political communication scholars of studying elections using Twitter data. We conclude our literature review by discussing the state of the art of Twitter political research in Spain, discussing the main studies and findings with regard to the Spanish ‘twittersphere’. The second section of the chapter is dedicated to the presentation of our research design. In this section we present and justify our research questions and hypotheses and discuss in detail our methodology, including our data collection strategy and a discussion of the methods adopted, namely: semi-supervised machine learning, co-occurrence analysis and network analysis. We conclude the chapter with a full outline of our research design, guiding the reader through the methodological and analytical steps which allow for the identification and analysis of ‘critical tweets’ from our initial dataset of 4.5 million tweets.

Chapter 4. Politicizing Europe: Insights from the Spanish Political Elite

In Chapter 4 we finally present and discuss the findings of our research with regard to the Spanish political elite. To contextualize our results, in the first paragraph we briefly outline the context in which the 2015 general elections were held, the fragmented electoral outcome, the failure of the negotiations to form the new government and the situation at the time of the 2016 Spanish general elections. We then present our findings with regard to the Spanish political elite. Following the three *nuclei* of questions mentioned above, we first assess the

extent to which EU-related issues have been politicized by the Spanish political elite and discuss the differences between the two elections. We then investigate the relationship between parties' positions on the left-right political spectrum and their willingness to politicize European integration, discussed in terms of relative salience and level of criticism. In the last paragraph, we proceed with the identification of the 'critical issues' raised by each party, qualitatively reconstructing the main claims and arguments advanced by the same. In conclusion, we discuss our results in the light of our four lines of conflicts.

Chapter 5. Politicizing Europe: Insights from the Spanish Public(s)

In Chapter 5 we present our findings with regard to the Spanish public(s). Parallel to the discussion on the Spanish political elite presented in Chapter 4, we start with an analysis of the extent to which Spanish citizens discussed and criticized the current state of European integration on Twitter during the 2015 and 2016 electoral campaigns, thus assessing the level of EU politicization amongst the Spanish public(s) and comparing it to that of their leaders. We then move to the investigation of the interactional structure of critical citizens, in order to see if their online behaviour results in the formation of relatively disconnected partisan communities. To complete our understanding of the political partisanship of critical Spanish citizens, we include in this chapter a parallel exploration, made on the basis of survey data, that investigates the political positioning of 'hard Eurosceptic' citizens - i.e. those citizens who would be in favour of an *Espexit*. Considering the lack of far-right Eurosceptic parties in Spain, we considered it intriguing to verify whether hard Eurosceptic instances were present or not amongst Spanish far-right citizens. In the last section of this chapter we conclude our analysis of EU politicization amongst Spanish citizens by discussing the main critical issues raised by the same. To do so, we present the results of our word-to-word co-occurrence network, in which words with similar appearance patterns are clustered together to allow for the identification of sub-topics amongst a large amount of textual data.

CHAPTER I. Political contestation in the contemporary European Union: four lines of conflict

In recent years, a global process of ‘politicization’ has affected the whole European project (De Wilde, 2011), thus contributing to the restructuring of its political conflicts, which now take place at the level of mass politics (Kriesi et al. 2008). As the results of 2014 European Parliamentary elections clearly show, the new salience of identity politics, the denationalization of the European political agenda and the populist backlash we have been witnessing since the beginning of the Eurozone crisis underline the ‘unfinished’ and fundamentally contested character of the EU. The contemporary European Union is therefore increasingly subject to regular critiques of its policy choices and actors but also to more principled forms of opposition, which question its institutional and constitutional architecture and even the rationale for its existence (De Wilde, Michailidou & Trenz, 2013).

Political contestation has placed the problem of the legitimacy of the European Union in a new light, to the point where it is now widely debated in the broadest public sphere of every member state whether the EU is “legitimate” (Boomgaarden et al., 2011; Koopmans & Statham, 2010; Risse, 2010). Understanding the nature of the political conflicts that are shaping the European Union becomes, therefore, a task of great importance, as it would allow us to unpack the reasons that have fostered and are still driving the mobilization of a wide range of actors including political parties, social movements and interest groups.

The aim of this chapter is to shed light on the origins, characteristics and content of the main lines of conflicts that have been identified as currently structuring European politics. In the first part of this chapter we retrace the origins of the problematic relationship between citizens and European institutions from their initial peaceful cohabitation to the post-Maastricht collision (Hooghe & Marks, 2009). We then introduce the concept of ‘politicization’, clarifying its origins and

empirical definition, its manifestations in relation to European integration and finally its functions. In the second section of this chapter, we focus on the four specific lines of conflict, reconstructing the academic debate that has developed around them and their relevancy for the interpretation of the current contentiousness around the European project.

1.1. Politicizing Europe: from permissive consensus to constraining dissensus

Although in recent years the politicized character of European integration has not been under question, political contestation has come into place only in the last 25 years. Before the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 in fact, the European Union was going through an era of “permissive consensus” (Hooghe & Marks, 2009). In their 2009 article *A Post-functionalist Theory of European Integration: From Permissive Consensus to Constraining Dissensus*, which constitutes a turning point in the literature on the topic, Hooghe and Marks reconstructed from a post-functionalist perspective the changes that have affected the European integration process and from which EU politicization has subsequently followed.

According to the authors, during the first three decades of integration the demand for the adjudication of economic disputes was the driving element of the creation of a European legal system (ibid., p. 6). As the implications for most ordinary people were limited or not transparent, public opinion was, in the main, quiescent (ibid.): they were the years of “permissive consensus”. Such an elite-centred view of the European project survived the creation of a European Parliament and even the European Parliament elections in 1979, considered as a sort of “popularity” test for national governments (Reif & Schmitt 1980). At the time, European integration was therefore generally a “non-issue” for the general public, albeit being an argument of high salience for business groups (ibid., p. 7).

Nevertheless, things were starting to change. As acknowledged by Bartolini (2005), “the second half of the twentieth century witnessed, on the one hand, the *golden age* of the national-democratic-welfare state, and, on the other, the

progressive opening up of a new phase of boundary redefinition in all functional spheres (i.e. economic, cultural, political, and coercive) that, by the latter quarter of the century, had become the dominant trend". Beginning in the 1980s, the tensions between the nation-based welfare states (NBWS) and European integration started to build up, in a process characterized by the rise of an increasingly stronger "economic space" that culminated in the completion of the internal market and the monetary union (EMU) (Ferrera, 2014a, p. 222).

As market integration was extended to monetary union in the 1990s, European integration quickly became a salient issue. The process of legitimating the Maastricht Treaty (1992) was a turning point in the causal underpinnings of European integration, as it transformed the nature of the EU from a primarily economic project into a political one (Serricchio et al., 2013, pp. 53). It exposed what before was a complex "elite bargain" to public inspection, thus generating a series of national debates which awoke citizens' interest and their concerns about the risk of losing national sovereignty (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 22). With the politicization of European integration, 1992 opens the era of "constraining dissensus".

The extent of political contestation towards the European Union became evident with the emergence of anti-European parties and movements and even more with the holding, in several European countries, of referenda on the adoption of the euro and on the ratification of the European constitution (Hooghe & Marks, 2009; Usherwood & Startin, 2013). With Denmark and Sweden refusing to participate in the EMU and the prevalence of the "no" front in the 2005 French and Dutch constitutional referenda, the increasing scepticism of European citizens became clear (Ceron, Curini & Mainenti, 2015, p. 63).

The 'deepening' of the EU, resulting from the new competences acquired by the EU following the TEU, was combined with the 'widening' of the EU through enlargement to central and eastern European countries (Serricchio et al., 2013, pp. 53), resulting in an amplification of the previous concerns. The existing tensions have been further exacerbated since 2007 by the financial crisis, which has resulted in the growth of Eurosceptic movements and parties in most

European countries and first and foremost in those countries that have been hit hardest by the sovereign debt crisis in 2010–11.

1.1.1. Politicization: definition, manifestations and functions

The politicization of European integration, which until a decade ago was seen as conspicuously absent, is now widely recognized: the EU is increasingly addressed by political parties, is a key concern for voters, and often the lead news item across the region (Statham & Trenz, 2015, p. 287). Nevertheless, although the concept of politicization is widely used, only in recent years scholars have attempted to clarify (a) its definition, (b) its empirical manifestations and (c) its functions. Before proceeding with our discussion of the lines of conflict presently shaping EU politics, in this section we briefly discuss the definition of EU politicization adopted for this research, identify which of its manifestations are empirically analysed in our work and, finally, we outline the relevance of the subject both from a functional and from an academic standpoint.

Definition

According to The Oxford Dictionary of the Social Sciences, ‘politicization’ can be defined as ‘a process through which certain issues become objects of public contention and debate, and are thereby legitimated as concerns of the state or political realm. Politicization is therefore generally a contentious process [...]’ (Calhoun, 2002). In the on-going debate on European integration, the term has acquired two parallel meanings. On the one hand, EU politicization has often been seen as a negative trend, primarily referring to the general decline of public support for European integration and the rise of Eurosceptic positions (Hooghe & Marks, 2006; 2009). In this view, politicization has been seen mainly as a tool at the service of the strategic calculations of political parties, who conveniently decide whether to politicize European issues and if so which ones, in order to broaden their electorate and acquire a more favourable position in the electoral

competition. On the other hand, the increase in EU politicization also indicates that the EU is maturing into a consolidated political system that facilitates citizens' interest and increases participation in European politics (De Wilde & Zürn 2012; Statham & Trenz, 2013). Following this latter interpretation, the new polarization of opinions and interests that currently characterizes the European Union would be first and foremost driven by an increasing diffuse awareness among European citizens that the 'EU matters': 'EU politicization' would thus entail not only "an increased level of resistance against the EU and its policies", but as well "an increased utilization of these political institutions by societal groups to achieve desired goals", potentially leading to "increasing public claims-making acts that address policy formulation" (Statham & Trenz, 2013, p. 292). From a public sphere perspective, EU politicization and democratization are thus interlinked "in a way that public contestations pose a challenge to executive decision making, raise democratic standards and trigger processes of public opinion and will formation" (ibid., p. 303).

Far from being contradictory, both definitions have the merit of underlying aspects of EU politicization relevant for our agenda: the role played by different parties in the politicization of EU related issues, on the one hand, and the intrinsic significance of the public in legitimating and democratizing the whole process of European integration, on the other hand. To encompass all the facets of EU politicization outlined above, hence moving to its empirical definition, scholars agree in conceiving of politicization as involving three sub-processes (Kriesi & Grande, 2014; De Wilde, 2011):

1. an increased salience of the issue in the public debate (*salience*);
2. a process of polarization amongst the political elites carrying the issue-specific debate (*contentiousness*);
3. an expansion of the issue-specific conflict to the general public (*expansion to the public*).

As we will extensively discuss in Chapter 3, one of the main difficulties

faced by researchers dealing with EU politicization is to build research designs able to capture all the three dimensions of EU politicization. Such a difficulty is due to the methods that have been available until now - mass and elite surveys, party manifestos and content analysis of newspapers – which tend to constrain research agendas towards focusing on either the political elite or the general public. In our work, we try to overcome this limit by proposing a Twitter-based research design that is able to separately investigate the salience, contentiousness, and expansion to the public of EU-related issues. Although the choice of relying exclusively on social media data presents its own limits, so far Internet-based data have been exploited only to a limited extent in this research area, so that we hope that our work can contribute to opening up new, parallel avenues for politicization research.

Manifestations

Moving to the manifestations of EU politicization, De Wilde (2011) has identified three different forms in which, according to the academic literature, politicization has manifested itself with regard to European integration: politicization of EU institutions, politicization of EU decision-making processes and finally politicization of issues related to European integration. In dealing with the politicization of EU institutions, scholars have mainly focused on the functioning of the political institutions of the multilevel EU-polity, including most notably the European Commission, European Parliament (EP), Council of Ministers, member states' governments, and national parliaments. Politicization occurs here “when party politicians gain a tighter grip on their operations leading to increasing prominence of party political conflict” (ibid., p. 561). On the contrary, in the study of the politicization of EU decision-making processes researchers have been mainly concerned with “the procedures, rules and practices that make up the day-to-day functioning” of these same political institutions. In this second case, politicization thus refers to “the increasing influence of elected or appointed politicians in decision-making processes at the expense of professionals, like

bureaucrats, experts and lawyers” (ibid.). Finally, the focus of this study is on the third manifestation of politicization i.e. the politicization of EU-related issues, which can be defined as “an increase in salience and diversity of opinions on specific societal topics” (ibid., p.560). Quoting De Wilde (2011, p. 562):

Politicization of issues may manifest itself as an increase in electoral importance as citizens take into account party preferences on these issues in the ballot box (Franklin & Wlezien, 1997). This salience results from societal actors like political parties, interest groups, social movements and mass media paying more attention to European issues and increasing their public claims for or against common policy, thus ‘cueing’ voters at the same time about the importance and contentiousness of a particular EU issue. Thus, whether an issue is politicized or not and deemed important by the electorate can indirectly be assessed by studying the extent to which it is publicly debated.

Drawing on these considerations, as discussed in our introduction we consider national elections as the ultimate context to investigate EU politicization, and it is for this reason that the focus of this work is on the online debate during the 2015 and 2016 Spanish general elections (see Chapters 2 and 3 for discussion on, respectively, the choice of Spain and the choice of Twitter).

Functions

In a public sphere context, politicization assumes three main functions. First, it structures political conflicts, articulating an initial plurality of opinions into a more focused and coherent set of claims on policy (Hix, 1999; Ray, 1999; Mair, 2000; Marks et al., 2002; Marks & Steenbergen, 2004; Van der Eijk & Franklin, 2004; Hix et al., 2005; 2006; Marks et al., 2006; Szczerbiak & Taggart, 2008a; 2008b; Lord, 2010). Second, it raises the question of legitimacy, potentially contributing to alleviating the EU’s democratic deficit both by providing citizens with meaningful choice during elections (Mair, 2005; Føllesdal & Hix, 2006; Ladrech, 2007; Lord, 2010) and by increasing the debate on European issues (Bellamy & Warleigh,

1998). Finally, it alters the course of integration. With regard to this last function, Schmitter argues that the rising controversiality of joint decision-making due to EU politicization ultimately leads to a widening of citizens' interest and participation in European integration, in a process in which "a manifest redefinition of mutual objectives will likely occur" (Schmitter, 1969, p. 166). This latter task recalls the attribution of a positive function to political conflicts: if kept within limits, they serve constructive purposes and are the motor of society, polity and institution building.

As outlined in the introduction, the process of increased EU politicization emerges as a consequence of the burst of the existing tension between European "social" and "economic" spaces, a tension that had been growing since 1992 and exploded with the occurrence of the economic and financial crisis. Albeit widely varying across countries and according to different issues, the outcome of the outlined process of clashes and disaffection resulted in the activation of new political conflicts, along with which EU politicization is likely to occur. In the next section we examine the origin and development of four distinctive lines of tensions that, having largely emerged from the strain between NBWS and the goals of economic integration, are now structuring the debate on the European Union (Ferrera, 2014a).

1.2. Contesting Europe: four lines of conflict

According to Ferrera (2005; 2014a), since its establishment the EU has launched three basic challenges to the social sovereignty of its member states. The first is a challenge to the nation-based welfare state (NBWS)'s territorial closure, through the prohibition of most cross-border restrictions regarding access to and consumption of social benefits. A second challenge has addressed the right of each national community to autonomously determine who has the right and/or the duty to share what with whom (Ferrera, 2014a, p. 222). Finally, through the imposition of increasingly stringent fiscal rules to national budget, the EU has intervened directly on the size and structure of domestic welfare, thus generating

EMU-induced austerity and spending cuts especially for those member states that violate such constraints (ibid.).

As outlined by Ferrera (ibid.), the tension between NBWS and the economic integration fostered by the EU has expanded along (at least) four distinct lines of tensions. The first one is ascribable to the traditional left-right cleavage, and is an opposition between market-making and market-correcting policy preferences at the EU level (*market-making vs. market-correcting*). A second line of conflict that is shaping the contemporary debate around the EU - and even more since the explosion of the “Greek case” – is represented by the contraposition between core and peripheral states in the EU. This first and foremost opposes payers and beneficiaries of cross-national transfers and financial assistance (*core vs. periphery*). The third emerged following the first wave of Eastern enlargements in 2004 and has exploded with the 2016 UK referendum, and opposes high welfare member states and low welfare member states in a system competition that manifests itself especially around the issue of “welfare tourism” and the call for restrictions to intra-EU mobility (*free movement vs. national closure*). Finally, we can identify a fourth line of conflict as rooted in the contraposition between the defence of national social sovereignty and the increasing role of EU conditionality (*integration vs. autonomy*).⁸ The Eurozone crisis has introduced a qualitative shift of politicization and transformed the context of European integration. As outlined by Trenz and Statham (2015), “public contestation and the discursive struggle over the ‘wins’ and ‘losses’ of integration have torn apart the old universalism that the EU is somehow an equal partnership between countries, and between its citizens”. On the contrary, “some countries are found to be more equal than others, and some constituencies ‘win’ and some ‘lose’, as a result of market integration” (Trenz & Statham, 2015, p. 303).

⁸ Theorized by Ferrera (2014), these four tensions are at the core of the ERC-funded project REScEU Reconciling Social and Economic Europe, in which framework I have developed my research. The project purpose is to cast new light on the genetic roots of such tensions, their temporal swings, the possible institutional solutions and their political pre-conditions. More information are available at: <http://www.resceu.eu/the-project.html>

Although the role of each of the individuated lines of conflict has already been debated in the scholarly literature, until now a systematic work that takes into account the four of them at the same time – researching their state of the art, their areas of intersection and their role in shaping political contestation – is still lacking. Before investigating them empirically, in the next sections we attempt to reconstruct the origins and developments of each of the outlined tensions, starting from the oldest and most widely established one: the left-right cleavage.

1.2.1. Market-making vs. market-correcting: the left-right cleavage at the EU level

The ideological continuum from left to right is a central organizing dimension of politics in Western Europe (Barnes & Kaase 1979; Hix 1999a, 1999b; MacDonald, Listhaug & Rabinowitz 1991; Hix & Lord 1998; van der Eijk & Niemöller 1983, Marks & Steenbergen 2004). At the core of political behaviour studies since the seminal work of Downs (1957) the left-right dichotomy has, thanks to its capacity to abstract and generalize voters' policy preferences, been described as a “shorthand” device that “provides a general orientation toward a society's political leaders, ideologies and parties” and that thereby facilitates comparisons through space and time (Inglehart & Sidjanski, 1976, p. 225).

Although a discussion about the meaning of “left” and “right” exceeds the scope of this work, what is interesting for our purpose is the inherent affinity between the traditional definition of the left-right cleavage and our understanding of the complex dynamics that have been involved in the relationship between social and economic Europe since the beginning of the European integration process. According to Lipset, in fact, left is defined as “advocating social change in the direction of greater equality”, while right means “supporting a traditional, more or less hierarchical social order, and opposing change toward greater equality” (Lipset et al., 1954, p. 1135). The idea that at the core of the left-right cleavage is the way in which goods and rights are distributed in a society is further stressed by Bobbio (1996) in his rather politico-philosophical book *Left and Right*,

where the author ultimately identifies the distinctive element that distinguishes left and right with the greater attention attributed to “equality” by the left.⁹

Although abstract, such a normative notion of “left” and “right” functions as a powerful guideline for interpreting the strain between market-making and market-correcting economic preferences at any political level, individuating the philosophical basis of welfare institutions. “The reason for social rights such as the right to education, the right to work and the right to health care is egalitarian”, states Bobbio. “All three aim at reducing the inequalities between the haves and the have-nots, or making it possible for an increasing number of individuals to be less unequal in relation to other individuals who are more fortunate by birth and social condition” (ibid., p. 71).

The same analytical connection between the left-right cleavage and market preferences is stressed by Lijphart (1984), who provides a more tangible understanding of the left-right dimension by breaking down the socio-economic issues associated with the left-right axis into four dimensions. As listed in his 1984 masterpiece, these dimensions are: *governmental vs. private ownership of the means of production*; *a strong vs. a weak governmental role in economic planning*; *support of vs. opposition to the redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor*; and finally *expansion of vs. resistance to governmental social welfare programmes*. Even though left parties in Western democracies do not fight anymore mainly for a comprehensive public ownership of the means of production or long-term economic planning, the left sides of these dimensions do still recall the general direction in which leftist parties tend with their desired policies (Hartmann, 2014, pp. 35-36), both at the European and at the national level. This is in line as well with Downs’ initial assumption that all political questions could be treated as having a bearing on the one crucial question “how much government intervention in the economy should there be?” (Downs, 1957, p. 116). This was to

⁹ “On the basis of my reflections so far [...] I believe that the criterion most frequently used to distinguish between the left and the right is the attitude of real people in society to the ideal of equality. [...] When we say the left has a greater tendency to reduce inequalities, we do not mean that it intends to eliminate all inequalities, or that the right wishes to preserve them all, but simply that the former is more egalitarian, and the latter more inegalitarian” (Bobbio, N., 1994, p. 60; 65).

be measured on a scale ranging from 0 to 10, where 0=left and meant *full government control of the economy* and 10=right and represented a *completely free market*. Although Downs himself admitted the lack of realism of his approach – with a number of extreme right-wing parties being fascist, and hence opposed to the free market, and many parties not having a single or unequivocal position on the scale (Mair, 2007, p. 208) - the general correspondence between the left-right positioning and market preferences remains unchallenged.

At the national level, we can therefore see how social policy has been viewed as favouring social justice through a market-correcting function (Barnard, 2012, p. 35). Such a function is defined by Marshall (1975, p. 15) as the “political power to supersede, supplement or modify operations of the economic system in order to achieve results which the economic system would not achieve on its own, [...] guided by values other than those determined by market forces”. These values include the need to redistribute income and resources in order to promote social inclusion and cohesion, thereby ensuring political stability (Barnard, op. cit., p. 35).

At the European level, market-correcting and market-making preferences have played a greater role both as principles guiding political visions on the scope and extent of the European Union itself and in the design of economic policies. On the one hand, elements of the market-correcting logic can be detected in the development of EU social legislation, with a renewed vigour given by the advent of European Union citizenship since the annexation of the “Social Chapter” to the Maastricht Treaty. On the other hand, several authors argue that the EU is, by definition, primarily a market-making project. Such a position, the original formulation of which hails from the early works of Scharpf (1996, 1999), is based on the idea that the European treaties are characterized by an in-built institutional setting favouring market-deepening over market-correcting policies (Hooghe, Marks & Wilson, 2004, pp. 128-129) - an asymmetry which is further enforced by the decisions of the European Court of Justice (ECJ). A similar argument is made by Streeck (1995), who has observed how economic governance through fragmented sovereignty and international relations is “more suited to market making by way of negative integration and efficiency enhancing regulation than to

institution building and redistributive intervention, or market distortion” (p. 399).

In the history of European integration, different phases can be identified as being characterized by the prevalence of more market-making or market-correcting orientations at the supranational level (Ferrera, 2014c). During the 1980s and early 1990s economic neoliberalism succeeded in putting down deep roots, especially within the OECD and most international economic organizations, the European Commission and, later, the European Central Bank (ECB). In these years “price stability, fiscal discipline, undistorted competition, free trade, consumer choice, deregulation, liberalization and privatization acquired lexicographic priority over any other economic and social objective” (ibid., p. 425; see Steger & Roy, 2010). Although in their original formulations both the Single Market and the EMU had mixed objectives, partly economic and partly political and not programmatically hostile to the social dimension (Vandenbroucke, 2012), economic neoliberalism can be considered as the driving force of these two main European projects and achievements of the 1990s (Ferrera, 2005; Leibfried, 2005; Scharpf, 2010).

The academic literature has identified one major setback in the Delors era (1985-1995), when the ideological climate began to change. With the Single European Act (1986), the European Union launched an ambitious programme in order to revamp the internal market. Such a programme, rooted in a “negative” approach to European integration, was characterized by two main goals: encouraging competition by removing barriers to the free movement of goods, services, money and people; and, on the other hand, strengthening the rules on competition-proofing. The socialist Jacques Delors, at the time President of the European Commission, attempted to introduce in the on-going process of market liberalization a parallel *social dimension*, whose main pillars were the recognition of some of the fundamental rights of the workers, the establishment of common standards of protection and the promotion of a “social dialogue” at the supranational level (Hix & Høyland, 2011).

The new salience and visibility acquired by the social dimension resulted in the adoption of the Social Protocol to the Maastricht Treaty. Although initially not

much followed from the social protocol, starting from the mid-1990s a doctrine of the appropriate role of the social dimension started to be defined under the general rubric of *social protection modernisation* (see EC 2005). In the new view adopted by the Commission, the renewed attention given to the social dimension was nevertheless presented as an “enriching and coherent expansion” of the neoliberal perspective, as social policy was conceived as an important “productive factor” (ibid.). As reconstructed by Hemerijck (2012), the Employment and Social Chapter of the Amsterdam Treaty (1997), the launch of the European Employment Strategy (1998) and later the adoption of the Charter of Fundamental Rights with the Nice Treaty (2001) and the establishment of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) on Social Inclusion (2001) were the clear results of the discursive re-orientation outlined. The results of the new discourse and agenda that hinged on the welfare state during the 2000s are also displayed in the formulation of the Lisbon Treaty, which considers a set of rules and measures in order to enhance employment and to enrich national social protection systems with social investment policies.

With the transition from Lisbon to the Europe2020 strategy, the coordination of national social and employment policies was de facto weakened (Ferrera, 2014d, p. 833). Two key developments exemplify the new ideological turn: the merging of the so-called OMC into the process of structural reform and coordination within the European Semester on the one hand, and on the other hand the expansion and hardening of the Stability and Growth Pack with the Fiscal Compact. As outlined by De la Porte and Natali (2014), the combined effect of these two developments has been a dramatic increase of the adjustment pressures on national public budgets and regulatory frameworks, which the EU social policy is utterly unequipped to face.

Although the idea of a “social Europe” has enjoyed renewed popularity since the mid-1990s, the economic crisis that has weighed down on the European Union since 2007 has proven that the current strength and content of the social dimension are still inadequate for safeguarding an acceptable and effective balance between state and market (Ferrera, 2014a, p. 223). A revitalization of the

social dimension is further obstructed by the impossibility of existing social provisions to cope with the other three mentioned lines of competition: system competition, core-periphery asymmetries and, first and foremost, the inadequate balance between supranational constraints and national discretion.

1.2.2. North vs. South: the financial crisis and the exacerbation of the existing conflict between EU economic “core” and “periphery”

In political geography, the concept of core has been used in two different ways. On the one hand, from an historical perspective it has been employed in order to identify those areas that formed the nuclei around which states were formed. Nevertheless, in a contemporary sense the concept of core has been used to describe “the area which is economically and politically dominant within a state” (Laffan, 2016; see also Whittlesey, 1939; Burghardt, 1969). Following this second connotation, Rokkan and Urwin define as peripheral an area which is *geographically distant, culturally different and economically dependent* on the core regions (Rokkan & Urwin, 1983, p.13).

In the European context, the presence of core-periphery dynamics was acknowledged since the beginning and addressed already in the Rome Treaty, which stated that the signatories to the treaty were committed to “harmonious development by reducing the differences existing between the various regions and the backwardness of the less-favoured regions” (Preamble, Rome Treaty, 1957). References to Germany as the “natural” core of the European Union were already present in academic works in the 1990s, as emblematically represented in the words of Wallace (1990), who underlined how “Germany and its neighbours in the Rhine Valley and across the Alpine passes constitute the contemporary core of Europe, in terms of economic interaction, social interchange and security focus. Historical *Europes* have largely revolved around the same broadly defined area” (Wallace, 1990, p. 14).

The unprecedented conditions of the 2008-09 financial crisis and the subsequent Eurozone sovereign debt crisis have shed a light on various aspects of the centre-periphery conflict, which, latent until recent years, has now become key in the debates on the legitimacy of the European Union and its eventual democratic deficit. The multiple layers of policy coordination that emerged in response to the crisis have initiated a process by which the EU is increasingly internally divided in terms of the level of vertical integration between the EU core group and a “new” periphery group of predominantly Southern European countries within the Eurozone, who became dependent on external financial support from the other member states (Schweiger & Magone, 2014).

As is well known, the global financial crisis took on a distinctive euro-area character in Autumn 2009, when the Greek government identified a serious fiscal gap following the October election that saw George Papandreou return to power. During the first months following the recognition of a pressing euro-crisis, the general attention was on Greece and its fiscal deficit: public debt was highlighted as the core problem to be addressed and it was in this direction that EU political actors made their first major policy intervention (Laffan, 2014). Nevertheless, from May 2010 investors and analysts warned about a risk of contagion from Greece to other vulnerable euro member states, namely Portugal, Ireland, Italy and Greece (the so-called GIIPS/PIIGS). In the following months, investors’ worries became to a great extent true: in November 2010 Ireland lost market access and in April 2011 Portugal followed. Between July and August 2011, the risk seemed to threaten Spain and Italy as well, which, representing a significant proportion of the euro economy, were considered both ‘too big to bail’ and ‘too big to fail’: if either of these countries could not access the markets, the problems facing the euro would deepen dramatically. There was tangible evidence of that risk in July and August 2011 as Italian and Spanish spreads widened, and by June 2012 Spain declared that it needed assistance to recapitalize its banks and Cyprus requested assistance. Although not without difficulties, a serious contagion from the euro crisis was contained to Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Cyprus – “small” “peripheral” European countries - with the Spanish programme being limited to its financial

system (Laffan, 2014; see cap 2 for extensive discussion on dynamics and effects of the crisis in Spain).

With regard to EU reactions to the crisis, as reconstructed by Peter Hall (2012, p. 363):

an initial disinclination to support Greece gave way to a rescue orchestrated by the EU in May 2010, followed by similar rescues for Ireland and Portugal in November 2010 and May 2011, and agreement to establish a short-term European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) to shore up the markets for European sovereign debt, finally ratified in October 2011. The Greek debt held by the private sector was restructured in March 2012 and the EFSF transformed into a European Stability Mechanism (ESM) equipped with E500 billion and a longer-term remit, albeit still not fully operational in late 2012. That was followed by efforts in early 2012 to establish a 'fiscal compact' strengthening the budgetary rules of EMU, supplemented in June 2012 by a modest effort to assemble investment funds for Southern Europe and a promise to establish a system for European banking supervision coupled to direct support for troubled banks from the ESM.

In order to limit the impact of the crisis, the peripheral states thus became dependent on a rescue by the core that controlled the terms of the bailouts, demanding severe fiscal retrenchment and a policy of *austerity*, which have imposed severe economic, social and political costs, amongst which the most compelling has been with no doubt the dramatic rise of unemployment (Laffan, 2014).

Although analysing the economic features of the euro-crisis in detail exceeds the scope of this work, examining the extended literature on the topic three dimensions have emerged as relevant for an understanding of the core-periphery divide: (I) *asymmetric policy-making* that has disadvantaged peripheral economies within the EU since their entrance into the EMU, imposing several constraints on Southern European countries' effective possibilities for preventing the crisis (Hall 2012); (II) an *unbalanced response* to the crisis that has disproportionately

imposed the costs of the crisis on the GIIPS; and finally (III) a *framing* of the crisis dominated by a single story line attributing blame to the peripheral states (Laffan, 2014) on the basis of their assumed political, economic and ‘cultural’ behaviours (Fukuyama, 2012; Tilford & Whyte, 2011; Tassinari, 2014).

Asymmetric policy-making

In their interpretation of the euro-crisis, some authors argue that the crisis might have been prevented by more assertive reforms focused on competition in markets for goods, labour or capital. As outlined by Hall (2012, p. 357-359), this argument is based on the view that all developed economies are “so similar” that “identical policies are appropriate for them”. Nevertheless, such an argument seems to ignore the ways in which national variations in the organization of the political economy promote alternative growth paths that may demand different approaches to policy (Hall & Soskice, 2011). According to Hall, a basic asymmetry was built into the EMU from its inception, as the Northern European political economies entered the monetary union with institutional frameworks well suited to the *export-led* growth strategies that offer the best route to economic success in such a union. For these countries, entry into the EMU posed few problems: a fixed internal exchange rate gave them an unprecedented advantage in the markets of their neighbours, and membership in a variegated union held down the external exchange rate of the euro (Hall, 2012, p. 359). On the contrary, the economies of Southern European countries were traditionally based on *demand-led* growth strategies, due to the fragmentation of their labour movements and the lack of the institutional capacities needed to coordinate skill formation and incremental innovation, as normally required for successful export-led growth (Hall, 2012; Avdagic, Rhodes & Visser, 2011; Regini, 1984; Royo, 2008; Perez, 1998). As a consequence, the Southern European economies joined the EMU with institutional frameworks badly suited to effective competition within such a union and they lost the capacity to devalue on which many had long depended (Hall, 2012, p. 359).

Unbalanced response to the crisis

The second element we wish to consider as relevant for the exacerbation of the core-periphery divide is connected to the institutional responses to the crisis. As outlined by Hall, the costs of adjustment have been imposed disproportionately on the GIIPS. “In return for EU supports” states Hall “Greece was forced to attempt one of the most drastic programmes of fiscal austerity in modern history aimed at reducing its budget deficit by eleven percentage points of GDP within three years. Ireland was required to reduce its budget deficit by nine percentage points of GDP in five years, and Portugal by six percentage points in three years” (ibid., p. 364). Such measures resulted in a precipitous rise of unemployment and in rapid declines in income in most Southern European countries. Here again, the prevalence of an ordo-liberal approach in the response to the crisis dovetailed nicely with the institutional structures underpinning export-led growth in Northern Europe, while Keynesian approaches would have been more congruent with the demand-led growth models of Southern Europe (ibid., p. 367). On the other hand, the costs of adjustment have been relatively low for Northern European countries, whose aid to the GIIPS consisted mainly in loans which would, in principle, be repaid, and in contributions to the EFSF which were “guarantees for its borrowing rather than direct transfers of funds” (ibid.). Furthermore, much of this aid went to servicing existing debts, whose sums were held by Northern European banks: somehow, countries of Northern Europe were bailing out their own banks. Although less debated, the risk that a Greek default could trigger another Lehman Brothers-type of event for German and French banks and the consequent adoption of resolutions focusing primarily on rescuing banks have led several economists to suggest that the crisis should be interpreted first and foremost as a financial crisis - and not just a sovereign debt crisis.¹⁰

Framing

¹⁰ See Eichengreen’s 2011 interview with the German newspaper *Der Spiegel*, amongst others.

The dispute on the proper interpretation of the crisis introduces the third and last element we wish to discuss for its effects on the exacerbation of the centre-periphery divide: the *framing* of the crisis. The framing of the crisis as a matter of national fiscal profligacy, rather than as a European banking crisis, has in fact undercut sentiments of European solidarity (ibid., p. 368) and deepened the opposition between “the fiscally pious nations of Northern Europe” and “the profligate countries in the South of the continent” (Tassinari 2014, p. 119). Since the North European interpretation prevailed, the crisis has been seen as a sort of “morality tale, pitting those who sinned against those who stuck to the path of virtue” (Tilford & Whyte, 2011), and leading to the emergence of something that might be termed *meridionalism* (Tassinari, 2014, p. 126). In this regard the use by the media of the acronym PIIGS is significant, which suggested a depiction of Southern European countries as dissolute (Laffan, 2014), as well as commentators’ obsessive underlining that *Schuld* in German means both ‘debt’ and ‘guilt’ (Tassinari, 2014, p. 125). What had been matters of political economy started to be portrayed as results of a *cultural clash*¹¹ between “a hard-working, Protestant, disciplined Northern Europe (Germany, Holland, and Scandinavia)” and “a lazy, profligate Catholic-Orthodox South” (Fukuyama, 2012). At the same time, Northern European people started also to be defined by stereotyped ‘essential ideas’ about austerity, discipline and rectitude, with Germany playing the role of “the author of austerity, helping drive youth unemployment in Italy, Spain and Greece to unprecedented levels” (Hewitt, 2012).

1.2.3. West vs. East, Old vs. New: the Eastern enlargement and the formation of a new divide among EU member states

¹¹ “All too often, however, the impact of cultural cleavages in Europe’s crisis management have been confined to the folklore sections of the international commentariat, with Northern European tabloids trumping up the mortgaging of the Parthenon as a solution to the Greek crisis and Southern European papers portraying German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Nazi fatigues” (Tassinari, 2014, p. 125).

Since 2004 the European Union has admitted thirteen new member states, eleven of which were post-communist countries that gained independence from Soviet hegemony or Yugoslavia between 1989 and 1991. Whereas the 2004 enlargement in economic terms has been smaller than previous enlargement rounds, it was characterized by greater differences between richer old member states and poorer new EU member states, thus prompting a wide debate on the threats that the rising *free movement vs. national closure* divide was posing to the process of European integration. The recent victory of the “Leave” front in the 2016 UK referendum on EU membership can certainly be included in such a divide, as scholars – together with journalists and politicians – agree in identifying the increased hostility to intra-EU immigration as one of the main determinants of Brexit. As summarized by McKee and Galsworthy (2016, p. 3), in fact,

the right of citizens from any country in the European Economic Area (EEA, comprising the EU plus Norway, Iceland and Lichtenstein) to work in the UK under the same conditions as British citizens has been a longstanding cause for complaint by some commentators. They argue that this equates to a lack of control over UK borders, which causes mass immigration and strains public services like the National Health Service (NHS), thus reducing quality of healthcare for everyone.

The worries that arose with the Eastern enlargement are largely rooted in the same argument that is at the basis of the other divides previously discussed: the juxtaposition between market-making and market-correcting policy preferences at the EU level and their effect on NBWSs. As outlined by Lindstrom (2010), the revitalization of the European project in the 1980s involved the explicit compromise that the single market was to proceed in tandem with maintaining social cohesion within and across its member states: a(n already difficult) compromise that the Eastern enlargement is argued to have further exacerbated in several ways.

The first concern usually linked to the Eastern enlargement is the one defined as *social dumping*; a mechanism that can take two different forms (Kvist, 2004).

On the one hand, it refers to the risk that in reaction to the increased competition generated by the accession of new member states, businesses from old member states would be incentivized to move abroad. To avoid this, wages are lowered or working conditions worsened to enable countries or firms to become or remain competitive in the market (ibid., p. 306). On the other hand, a second form of social dumping is related to labour or business as a product factor *entering* the country (ibid.), since “East European workers move to the West” (Lindstrom, 2010, p. 1309). This is possible through the free movement of services that entails the right to offer services across borders and to establish companies in other countries¹² (Kvist, 2004, p. 306). Inherent to both the sides of social dumping is the worry that new member states’ lower tax rates, laxer regulatory standards and weaker social provisions will lead to a European-wide ‘race to the bottom’ in labour and social standards, as governments have to compete to retain or attract mobile capital (Lindstrom, 2010, p. 1310). In the form of a “Polish Plumber”, such fears played a crucial role in the 2005 failed French referendum on the European constitutional treaty. They also became central in the opposition to the ‘Bolkestein Directive’, a 2005 European Commission proposal to liberalize the service sector. In particular, concerns have been related to Bolkestein’s proposal to introduce a “country of origin” principle, which would allow the hypothetical Polish plumber to provide his services in any EU Member State while being subject to Polish laws and regulations (ibid., p. 1308). The opposition to the directive culminated in mass demonstrations in Brussels and Strasbourg. In 2006 a watered-down version of the directive was passed by the European Parliament but “they left open questions concerning the extent to which rules on free movement of services can override national laws and practices deemed to impede free movement” (ibid.), leaving such issues to the European Court of Justice to adjudicate on a case-by-case basis (see below for details about the ECJ’s most controversial rulings).

¹² In particular, as underlined by Kvist, trade unions have expressed fears of social dumping by the influx of so-called ‘arms-and-legs companies’, which de jure are companies established to promote a service, e.g. in the building industry, but de facto are one-person companies offering labour under wage and working conditions that are below the normal standard in the country (ibid.).

A second risk that has been widely debated in relation to the Eastern enlargement is related to so-called *welfare tourism*, defined as “the concern that EU free movement of persons could be used by individuals (seen as “benefit tourists”) to take advantage of more generous welfare systems” (Remeur, 2013, p.1), in a situation where people migrate “in order to get as many social benefits as possible and to contribute as little as possible” (Kvist, 2004, p. 306). Public debates on the Eastern enlargement of the EU and the consequent risk of welfare tourism have appeared in the headlines with higher intensity since the start of the economic crisis, reflecting the common concern over a massive move of people from new to old member states as a consequence of the existing differences in their welfare systems. In this regard, the main argument for opposing Eastern enlargement has been connected to the risk of the deterioration of social policy for the original target groups in the host countries and to the erosion of the financial basis for national welfare systems as a whole (ibid.).

Although less common, Kvist identifies a third concern in the fear of *social raids*, defined as the deeply-rooted worry of “surprise attacks on national social security [carried out] by a small or large group of people from abroad” (ibid.). Similar to welfare tourism, the specificity of social raids is identified in the fact that, in cases applying to this category, getting work is used as an entry ticket into the national welfare system, sometimes with a view to exporting benefits to the home country or to migrants’ family members. Such worries have been expressed in particular in the commissioned works on enlargement in Denmark and Sweden.

Finally, new members are argued to be more economically liberal in orientation than their continental counterparts due to the failure of state socialism that has resulted in a general scepticism about any sort of state intervention into the market (Meardi, 2002). This hypothesis has led some scholars to predict that new member states would be more closely aligned with like-minded states such as the UK and Ireland in boosting more liberal policies, thus modifying the existing equilibrium in favour of market-making policies (Grabbe, 2004).

Empirical evidence regarding the extent to which the outlined worries have come true is still controversial. On the one hand, the intervention of the ECJ in

controversies regarding the phenomena of social dumping has confirmed the worries of those who saw in the Eastern enlargement a threat to labour standards in old member states. In particular, two landmark cases related to the liberalization of services have come before the Court: the *Laval* and *Viking* cases. The *Laval* case involved a Latvian construction company employing Latvian workers in Sweden. When the Latvian firm refused to enter a collective agreement with the Swedish construction workers' union, the Swedish unions organized industrial actions that caused the bankruptcy of Laval. After the Swedish labour court ruled that the Swedish unions' actions were legal, the Latvian firm's case was referred to the ECJ to decide whether the boycott violated the free movement of services (Lindstrom, 2010, p. 1308). By contrast, the *Viking* case involved a Finnish ferry company that wanted to reflag one of its boats to Estonia in order to benefit from Estonia's lower wage rate. The Finnish Seamen's Union, supported by the International Transport Workers' Union, protested the decision, which was then brought before the ECJ (ibid.). With the ECJ ultimately ruling with the employers' positions, and against the expressed preferences of most old member states, the rulings have strengthened the position of advocates of further liberalization in the enlarged EU (ibid., p. 1309). Furthermore, the clustering of member state positions in the quoted cases supports the expectation that in most economic policy matters new member states would have joined forces with more liberal states such as the UK and Ireland in pushing for further liberalization, suggesting the possibility of an emerging divide between new and old member states on European socio-economic issues (ibid., p. 1322).

If the ECJ rulings support the concerns related to the risk of further liberalization, worries about welfare tourism do not seem to find validation, at least according to current research, as no statistical findings substantiate the existence of people attracted by welfare benefits (Kvist, 2004; Remeur, 2013; Guild, Carrera & Eisele, 2013; Dustmann, Frattini & Halls, 2010). Despite the absence of empirical support for their fears, public support for the extension of intra-EU mobility to Eastern citizens remains low: at the time of the 2015 Spanish elections, for just above half of Europeans the immigration of people from other EU member

states evokes a positive feeling (51%), while it evokes something negative for four respondents in ten (40%) (Standard Eurobarometer 83).

In the founding member states, the negative position towards previous and future enlargement is rooted in a 'narrative of utilitarian rejection', focused on the supposed negative consequences of immigration from Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC) to old member states (see Dimitrova, Kortenska & Steunenberg 2015; Boomgaarden et al. 2011, Karp & Bowler 2006 among others).¹³ Most of the arguments presented so far as shaping the free movement vs. national closure divide are connected to utilitarian forms of cost-benefit analysis. Nevertheless, a second reason for hostility toward Eastern enlargement (and somehow also toward the EU as a whole) stems from "instinctual reactions to the idea of other cultures" (McLaren, 2002, p. 564). Perceived cultural threats also appear to have powerful effects on public opinion, generating a general fear of the degradation of one's culture and one's nation that leads some to be hostile toward the European Union. Although underestimated in the scholarly literature, a sort of cultural component has been rooted in the West-East divide since its origins, to the point that "the forsaking of ECE¹⁴ following World War II came naturally for west European and American leaders, many of whom viewed the East as politically, economically and culturally distinct – and importantly, inferior" (Epstein & Jacoby, 2014, p. 3).¹⁵

With the end of the temporary restrictions on the free movement of nationals of new member states in 2011 and 2013, the issue of intra-EU mobility has become highly politicized. In 2013, a joint Austrian, German, Dutch and UK letter was addressed to the Council Presidency and Commissioners of competence in order "to combat welfare tourism". In the letter, Ministers argued that

¹³ Discourses of utilitarian rejection are exemplified by statements such as: "I think unemployment is the biggest problem. It is related to the enlargement. Now that the Romanians and the Bulgarians don't need visas, they can work anywhere in the EU and many companies think: they are cheaper workforce and we can earn more" (see Dimitrova, Kortenska & Steunenberg, 2015).

¹⁴ Central and Eastern European Countries, better known as CEEC.

¹⁵ See also Brenner 1989; Janos 1989, 2000; Wolff 1994; Bunce 2000; Rothschild and Wingfield 2000

a number of municipalities, towns and cities in various member states are under a considerable strain by certain immigrants from other member states. These immigrants avail themselves of the opportunities that freedom of movement provides, without, however, fulfilling the requirements for exercising this right. [...] This type of immigration burdens the host societies with considerable additional costs as [...] a significant number of new immigrants draw social assistance in the host countries [...] burdening the host countries' social welfare systems.

According to the authors, “this kind of mobility between the member states and the excessive strain on the social systems in the receiving societies *threaten the acceptance of the European idea of solidarity*” and calls for “practical measures” to address the pressures placed on NBWS. It is difficult not to see in this letter a challenge to one of the cornerstones of European integration: the principle of non-discrimination on the grounds of nationality (*civis europeus sum*).

The issue of intra-EU mobility has become controversial not only in the relationship between national governments and the European Commission, but also between old and new member states. Amongst others, particularly significant in this regard is the case of the United Kingdom where, after establishing itself as a crucial issue both in the 2014 European Parliament elections and in the 2015 British general elections, hostility towards intra-EU mobility is now acknowledged as one of the main factors driving citizens to vote for the “Leave” front in the 2016 UK referendum on European Union membership. As outlined by Tilford (2015), although net immigration into the UK over the last 15 years has not been exceptional in an EU context and Britain also has a strong record of integrating migrants, we can identify (at least) four reasons that might explain the increasingly negative perception of intra-EU migration in the UK: (I) the sharp fall in British workers’ real wages between 2008 and 2014 (with those on low wages suffering the biggest falls), the responsibility for which has often been linked to immigration; (II) a housing problem, which has left a growing proportion of the workforce living in expensive, cramped, privately rented accommodation and the blame for which has been often pinned on immigrants; (III) a supposed high pressure on the

National Health Service (NHS) and education services, perceived as an effect of immigration; and last but not least (IV) the sociological consequences of the diminishing social status of the white working class.

Although the UK remains by far the most striking case, similar dynamics can be seen in several old European Union countries. To take another example, in Germany the anti-euro and anti-solidarity party Alternative für Deutschland is gaining electoral success also thanks to its pronounced orientation against immigration, not to speak about the recently born xenophobic Pegida movement.

1.2.4. National social sovereignty vs. supranational authority: characteristics of the national-supranational divide

As we have seen in the previous sections, one of the major controversies in the implementation of a social Europe – and common to all the three lines of conflicts examined in this chapter - is directly connected with the delicate balance between supranational constraints and national discretion. In this regard, the literature on European integration has been dealing in recent decades with two main inter-related processes taking place at the European level: the delegation of several policy competences to the supranational level and the establishment of a new set of political institutions with executive, legislative and judicial power (Hix & Goetz, 2000). In relation to social policy, the national-supranational divide becomes therefore significant as it addresses the question of whether issues of social policy should be tackled at the European or at the national level. Furthermore, it deals with the question of the extent to which European policy measures should intervene in the welfare regimes of member states (Bähr, 2010, p. 129).

In the first lines of the Treaty of Rome (1957), the representatives of the six signatory governments declared that they were “determined to lay the foundations of an ever-closer union among the peoples of Europe”, thus implicitly referring to the federalist ideas that had been playing a key role in the enhancement of the European integration process during the aftermath of World War II. Although the

goal of establishing an ever closer union among “the peoples of Europe” was restated in the Lisbon Treaty and despite the substantial results achieved in terms of the constriction of social sovereignties, several steps are still missing in order to be able to address the EU as a “Federal Union”.

Among the several obstacles faced by the EU in its way to further integration (“a closer union”), the opposition of some member states has played a significant role. A first stop to this process was triggered by the accession to the European Union of the United Kingdom, a country that from the beginning was interested in the EU as an integrated economic area more than as a political union. In accordance with this, since Maastricht the UK has been asking for (and obtaining) a series of derogations and exceptions to several common policies (“opt outs”). In addition, two other groups of European countries have joined the UK in opposing the project of further integration: the Nordic countries, which defend their nation-based systems of solidarity, and the Eastern post-Communist countries, which are resistant to any form of sovereignty perceived as a treat to their recently reached democratic self-determination.

In the academic literature, the first work addressing systematically the controversy around the European integration process was probably Ernst Haas’ *The Uniting of Europe* (1958), which adopted a neo-functionalist approach to analyse the dynamics of domestic support vs. opposition to European integration. Nevertheless, at the time his work remained the only one suggesting the risk of the politicization of the European integration process within member states, while most scholars were still conceiving of the integration process as one of “permissive consensus” where integration was taking place *among* but not *within* countries (Marks & Steenbergen, 2004, p. 1).

In 2004 a first attempt to systematically investigate the role of European integration in shaping public opinion and party positioning resulted in the publication of the book *European integration and political conflict*. Edited by Marks and Steenbergen, the volume consists of a collection of essays that, using diverse sources of data and examining a range of authors, investigate the relationship between political contestation concerning European integration and the left-right

cleavage that had shaped political life in Western Europe until that moment. Although 10 years have passed since the publication of the book, a reinterpretation of the results there presented is still important to shed light on the dynamics that are affecting the process of European integration at different aggregation levels.

At the aggregate level, the authors found that an overall significant linear association between the issue of European integration conceived as a whole and the left-right cleavage was at the time absent, especially when investigated from a public opinion perspective (Gabel & Hix, 2004). Nevertheless, the national-supranational divide was suggested to be a “sleeping giant” (van der Eijk & Franklin, 2004), which “has the potential, if awakened, to impel voters to political behaviour that undercuts the bases for contemporary party mobilization in many, if not most, European polities” (ibid., p. 32).

Given the absence of a widely recognized linear relationship, the most powerful association between the left-right cleavage and European integration at the aggregate level is described by an ‘inverted U-curve’, where support for European integration is stronger among centrist parties, and opposition takes place among parties located at the extremes of both left and right (Aspinwall, 2002; Hix & Lord, 1997; Marks, Wilson & Ray, 2002; Taggart, 1998, Hooghe, Marks & Wilson 2004). Such a model appears particularly powerful when adopting an issue-based approach: although the difference in the degree to which the left and the right support European integration as a whole is not as wide as expected, when focusing on issue-positioning the effect of left and right political preferences displays its role, both at the party and at the individual level. This holds even more for European issues that have to do with the political regulation of the market, which have been found to be the most closely connected to the left/right spectrum.

According to Hooghe, Marks & Wilson (2004), the location of national political parties on the left-right divide determines whether they support or oppose European integration on policies related to regulated capitalism. The centre-left is in fact likely to support political integration in order to create European-regulated

capitalism with the capacity to regulate markets, redistribute resources, and sustain partnership among public and private actors. Left-wing parties have thus become distinctly more pro-integration since the 1990s, when regulated capitalism became part of the European agenda. On the other hand, market liberals view national sovereignty in terms of its implications for economic exchange. They are opposed to barriers to trade, and they therefore support strong international regimes that can facilitate market integration, but at the same time oppose the creation of a powerful and legitimate continental authority that could be used to control markets. Centre-right parties' support for market integration results therefore in a support for European integration in general terms, but they oppose policies that regulate capitalism (i.e. environment, cohesion and employment policies).

The radical left and extreme right, finally, both display a tendency against European integration, due to very different reasons. In the case of radical left parties, opposition to European integration is "rooted in the perception that European integration fundamentally threatens cherished radical left goals and that the European Union has been co-opted by mobile capital" (ibid., p. 129). Underlying this reaction is the hard fact that "the European Union is fundamentally inhospitable to radical left policy goals. [...] Even EU institutions that facilitate regulated capitalism will not provide the kind of policies radical leftists deem essential to curb market forces: public control over capital flows, extensive public investment in industrial policy, a statutory right to work, and a statutory reduction of the working week" (ibid.). On the other hand, radical right and right-populist parties see European integration as a threat to the national community, thus opposing it for the same reasons for which they oppose immigration.

Although Hooghe, Marks and Wilson's explanation is still powerful in explaining in general terms national party positioning concerning European integration also in present times, the volume stimulates further reflections that deserve to be taken into account. A first element that should be considered when referring to EU integration in terms of left-right positioning is the absence of a "natural connection" between left-right positioning and citizens' opinions about

European integration, as has been outlined by van der Eijk and Franklin (2004, pp. 32-50) in regards to voters' preferences on European matters at the national level. Such a relationship largely depends, in fact, on the way in which EU integration has been – and will be – politicized, first and foremost by political parties. According to van der Eijk and Franklin, until the 2000s voters were in fact induced to express in their party choice only their left/right ideological concerns, as the party system was forcing them to ignore their preferences regarding European integration by not offering them a choice between different visions of Europe. In this context, small parties located at the extremes of the left-right political spectrum, with a history of weak electoral support and/or who were locked out of the government were the first ones politicizing the issue of European integration, as they had a higher interest in restructuring contestation compared to parties that were already successful in the existing structure of contestation (*ibid.*, p. 123).

A second, parallel, argument was presented by Ray (2004, pp. 51-61) in reference to the different beliefs about the appropriate venue for policy-making across European member states. Given the diversity of prevailing conditions across Europe, the expected impact of EU-level decision-making in a given policy area is likely to differ across nations: “only if European nations were homogeneous in their current political, economic and social conditions”, argues Ray, “could the institutional dimension be either independent of, or consistently related to, the left/right ideological divide” (*ibid.*, p. 52). Drawing on this argument, he hypothesized that members of a group were likely to prefer EU-level policy-making when the disutility of the expected outcome of EU-level policy-making was smaller than the disutility of the prevailing national policy. Taking as an example the attitude towards social protection and starting from this background assumption, he showed how respondents in nations with higher social protection spending were more likely to fear the loss of benefits (and thus to be adverse to European integration), although the effect was weaker than expected among higher income groups. A similar argument is further supported by Brinegar, Jolly and Kitschelt in their chapter on varieties of capitalism and political divides over European integration (2004, pp. 62-92).

Although 10 years have passed since the publication of the volume, its findings still present useful guidelines for the investigation of the present dynamics underlying support vs. aversion towards further European integration. On the one hand, the inverted-U curve outlined by Hooghe, Marks and Wilson is still powerful in explaining national party positioning about the EU. On the other hand, the works just mentioned suggest that the constellation of attitudes towards European integration is not fixed, but depends on at least three factors at different levels: on parties' opportunities and constraints at the national level, on the current "political, economic and social conditions" of European countries, and last but not least on the prevalence of a particular set of policy goals at the EU level.

In recent years, the evolution of the EU in terms of its Eastern enlargement and the exacerbation of the core-periphery conflict with the economic crisis have re-shaped European politics along all three dimensions, thus opening a space for a renewed investigation of the present state of public attitudes towards European integration. Two aspects, in particular, are playing nowadays a relevant role in politicizing the integration-autonomy divide. First is the interference of the EU in national fiscal and budgetary policies – first with the Stability and Growth Pact in 1997 and even more since the adoption of the Fiscal Compact in 2012, which makes it obligatory for national budgets to be balanced or in surplus in order to avoid the activation of an automatic surveillance mechanism. The second is the increasing intrusion of European economic governance into national legislations.

The economic crisis has exacerbated the tensions characterizing the integration-autonomy divide, in a debate in which arguments about "which type of European Union we want" are ever more accompanied by hard euro-sceptic discourses questioning the European Union itself. In their study about the 2009 European Parliament elections based on the analysis of online news platforms and political blogs, De Wilde, Michailidou and Trenz discovered that EU polity contestation during the election campaign predominantly concerned the current institutional set-up of the EU, with few evaluations concerning the future project of integration and even fewer evaluations of the principle of integration (De Wilde, Michailidou & Trenz, 2014a).

At the level of mass politics, in several member states we have witnessed a rise of Euro-sceptic parties both from the left and the right side of the political spectrum. An electoral upsurge of the anti-austerity left has been visible in many countries, from the victory of Syriza in Greece to the unprecedented success gained by Podemos in Spain. At the same time, new right-wing formations have been rising in other member states, the most relevant of which are probably: Front National in France; UKIP in the United Kingdom; Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) and Pegida in Germany; True Finns in Finland; Golden Dawn in Greece and Party for Freedom (PVV) in the Netherlands.

In the 2014 European Parliament elections, Eurosceptic formations have gained seats in most EU member states, receiving an unprecedented vote share: more than 30% in Denmark, the Netherlands, the UK, Sweden and Italy; more than 20% in France, Cyprus, Austria and Greece, and more than 10% in Ireland, Czech Republic and Portugal, with an EU mean of 14.8% (Emanuele, Maggini and Marino, 2014). Although the success of Eurosceptic parties has not been homogeneous across Europe, the challenge to traditional party systems cannot be denied.

At the same time, scepticism about the EU largely emerges at the level of public opinion. At the time of the 2015 Spanish general elections, only 41% of European citizens had a positive opinion about the EU, while 38% were neutral and 19% had a negative opinion; a negative image of the EU represented the predominant view in Cyprus (42%) and Austria (36%). Only four Europeans in ten agree that their voice counts in the European Union (42%) while exactly half of EU citizens disagree (50%) with that statement. At the national level, less than a quarter of interviewees agree that their voice counts in the EU in Cyprus (19%), Greece (20%) and Latvia (23%) (Standard Eurobarometer 83). Given these new developments in political contestation in the European Union, the project now turns to the case of Spain.

CHAPTER II. 30 years of Spain in the EU: History, Parties and Public Opinion (1986-2016)

Since its accession to the European Community in 1986, Spain has been considered as one of the most pro-European countries. According to the scholarly literature, the main reason for this relates to the net benefits that Spain, “a comparatively less developed economy and society with a history richer in authoritarian than democratic experiences” (Gómez-Reino, Llamazares & Ramiro, 2008, p. 136), extracts from being incorporated into Europe (see Szmolka, 1999; Díez Medrano, 2003 amongst many others). Although with limits, until 2008 such a generally positive view of the European integration process thus informed both parties’ and citizens’ attitudes towards the EU.

Nevertheless, the economic crisis and the austerity measures that followed have abruptly interrupted such a “honeymoon”. As outlined in Chapter 1, by June 2012 Spain declared that it needed assistance to recapitalize its banks. Although Spanish rescue has been limited to its financial system, Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy and his government had to pledge to introduce severe major reforms to the Spanish economic system in order to receive a loan from the European Stability Mechanism to resolve the country’s ailing post-crisis banking sector (Magone, 2016). Even though the terms of the bailout were much less drastic than in other countries – such as Greece - also in Spain severe economic, social and political costs have been imposed in the name of austerity. Such a situation has deeply affected both citizens’ views of the EU and the polarization of parties on the issue of European integration. On the one hand, Spain is in fact the country in which the view that “EU membership is a good thing” declined most between 2007 and 2013 (-26 percentage points) (Eurobarometer 40 years, 2013)¹⁶, followed by

¹⁶ Although this is an unprecedented decline, it is important to notice that in 2016 Spain was still one of the most pro-European countries, as discussed in the following paragraphs. On the one hand, after a steep decline culminated in 2013, Spaniards’ positive views of the EU started a new

Greece and Portugal. On the other hand, the traditional lack of party conflict over European integration has unwound since the 2014 European parliamentary elections, when a new left-wing party calling for a renegotiation of austerity measures and the curtailment of the Treaty of Lisbon asserted itself as the third political force in Spain. The further growth of Podemos's electoral success, culminating in reaching 20.65% votes in the 2015 Spanish general elections, suggests that the anti-austerity ideas for which the party is mouthpiece have gained ground amongst the public.

In this chapter we retrace the origins and evolution of the relationship between Spain and the EU from its accession 30 years ago until present times. In the first section we retrace the history of the relationship, outlining the key moments and events that have happened since Spain submitted its application for accession to the European Community (EEC) in 1962, with a deeper focus on the years of the economic crisis (2008-2013). In the second paragraph we focus on the Spanish political and party system, presenting an historical overview of traditional parties and their positioning with regard to the issue of European integration, outlining the changes in the party system since the economic crisis and finally discussing the political context in which the 2015 and 2016 elections took place. Finally, in the third section we investigate citizens' perspectives and their attitudes towards the EU, using longitudinal data from Eurobarometer to describe the evolution in public opinion and results from a recent REScEU survey (2016) to depict the present situation in the light of the four lines of conflict outlined in Chapter 1.

2.1. Thirty years of EU membership: a brief history

2.1.1. Before accession (1977-1986)

ascending path (see par. 2.2.3 for discussion), suggesting that 2013 results were indeed a reflection of the economic crisis. On the other hand, at least amongst the countries examined in the 2016 REScEU survey, Spain is still the country with the lowest percentage of citizens willing to vote "Remain" in an eventual referendum on their country's EU membership.

Spain's first attempt to join the European Economic Community (EEC) dates back to 1962, when the Spanish Foreign Minister sent a letter to Walter Hallstein, President of the Commission of the European Community, asking for the opening of negotiations with the objective of examining the possible accession of Spain to the Community (Tamames, 1989). Nevertheless, due to internal and external pressures¹⁷ with the on-going Francoist authoritarian regime, the response of European institutions was half-hearted and the Commission merely acknowledged the receipt of the letter. On 6 June 1964, following a second request from the Spanish government, the Council authorized the Commission to open conversations to "examine the economic problems that the European Community causes to Spain, and to look for the appropriate solutions". After eight years of negotiations, on 29 June 1970 the EEC agreed to a preferential tariff agreement with the objective of eliminating the barriers to the commercial exchanges between Spain and the Community (Jiménez & de Haro, 2011; Royo & Christopher Manuel, 2003).

After Franco's death in 1975, King Juan Carlos supported the return of democracy to the country, thus opening a transition period that led to the elaboration of a new Constitution and culminated in the 1977 general elections, the first free elections for almost 40 years (Royo & Christopher Manuel, 2003). The emergence of a democratic regime paved the way for the successful consideration of Spain's application for membership by the European Community. The first democratic government officially submitted its application for accession to the European Community on 28 July 1977 and in November of the same year

¹⁷ As mentioned by Royo and Christopher Manuel (2003), "From the outside, several organizations pressured the Community to reject the Spanish request. In 1962 the Confederation of European Unions sent a letter to Hallstein pressuring for a rebuff. Several European newspapers joined in the campaign against Spain's request. 'The EC has to say no to Spain', stated the Netherlands's newspaper *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, 'until the spirit of democracy and liberty are present in the country'. The Congress of the European Federalist Movement meeting in Lyon at that time approved a resolution in which it rejected the possibility of any agreement between Spain and the EC. The Socialist Group on the European Parliament also said no to the Spanish request. Finally, the Congress of the European movement, meeting in Munich on June 1962, with the participation of a Spanish delegation, approved another resolution in which it was stated that only democratic countries could join the European Community - the Spanish representatives in this Congress were later punished with jail for their participation" (p. 9). See also Pou Serradell (1973) on the topic.

Spain joined the Council of Europe. The European Commission submitted a favourable opinion on the Spanish application in November 1978. On 6 February 1979 negotiations started, and, after a lengthy and tense negotiation, on 12 June 1985 Spain's accession treaty was signed (Jiménez & de Haro, 2011, p. 106). As outlined by Jiménez and de Haro,

during this first period EC membership was perceived and presented in public discourse as a required step in the socioeconomic modernisation of Spain after the Francoist dictatorship. Principles related to the democratic normalisation of Spain were at the centre of partisan positions towards the EC, while at the same time mitigating euroscepticism (ibid., p. 113)

If the consolidation of the newly born Spanish democracy was one of the main rationales for the wide Spanish consensus on European integration during the accession period, the expectation of advantages in economic terms also played a great role. From the mid-1970s the negative consequences of not being part of the EC were in fact clear, and although the economic costs of accession were perceived as high in the short run, benefits were expected in the future and economic reforms were thought to be inescapable anyway (ibid.). In this framework, Europe has become a 'master symbol' (Turner, 1967) - together with the semiotic meanings of 'civilisation' and 'modernisation' (Moreno & Serrano-Pascual, 2011) – whose appeal was used profusely in the following years by political, social and economic actors as an important rhetorical recourse to convey their interests and demand social justice and/or economic prosperity (Moreno, 2013)

As concluded by Moreno and Serrano-Pascual (2011), accession to European integration was thus perceived – and framed by the political elite – as a historical opportunity for Spain to proceed with the reforms necessary to modernize the Spanish economy while at the same time reinforcing the democratic path on which it had just embarked. In such a context, the result was

thus an overall agreement about Spanish accession and the positive impact of the EC.

2.1.2. National reforms, structural funds and a pro-federalist discourse: Spain and the European Union under González's first and second governments (1986-1993)

Since January 1986, the Spanish national economic system has been exposed to the impact of EC accession. As mentioned by Powell (2003), some of the problems faced by Spain as an EU partner might be explained by “its very peculiar position that does not fit into any of the categories into which all others may be grouped: the very prosperous and large; the very prosperous and small; the less prosperous and small”.

In line with what happened in other member states (Hooghe & Marks, 2009), in Spain, too, the consensual favour which had characterized parties' and citizens' attitudes towards the EU had a first downward turn concomitant with the signing of the Maastricht Treaty. In particular, in 1993 Spain was facing a serious economic crisis, with a double-figure unemployment rate, negative gross domestic product (GDP) growth and up to three devaluations of the national currency (Powell, 2003), which made it particularly difficult for Spain to comply with the EMU convergence criteria.

Although such a situation could potentially have led to an increasing contentiousness around the European integration process, the signature of the Maastricht treaty was politicized only to a limited extent, especially if compared to other European countries. The PSOE government lead by Felipe González, in fact, considered that “the solution was not to question EC membership but to deepen European integration” (Jiménez & de Haro, 2011, p. 114). The socialist premier attached high priority to building a strong alliance with Mitterrand and Kohl that allowed Spain to participate in the Community's “hard core” while promoting initiatives such as subsidiarity, European citizenship and closer economic relations with Latin America.

At the European level, the Spanish socialist government combined a commitment to far-reaching European integration and the claim for Community funds to enable the country to close the gap with the big member states (Morata & Fernández, 2003). In 1989, Spain vetoed the EC budget in order to force agreement on doubling the Structural Funds as a compensation for accepting the Single European Market. The Spanish negotiators were further able to build a winning coalition including three small member states - Portugal, Greece and Ireland - to obtain additional resources to improve transport and environmental infrastructures at the Edinburgh Council (1992), which culminated with the introduction of the Cohesion Fund in 1993, of which Spain has been the major recipient: between 1993 and 1999 about 60% of the EU Cohesion Fund was directed toward Spain (European Commission, 1996; see also ECORYS Transport 2005).¹⁸

These obvious benefits appeared to hide or compensate for some of the economic costs of adjustment and sheltered the EU from widespread criticism (Newton & Donaghy, 1997). The socialist government had in fact to commit itself to fiscal adjustment despite the on-going economic crisis, enhancing an economic restructuring that was largely based on the flexibilization of the labour market, something strongly opposed by the trade unions (Marín Arce, 2000). Although less significantly than in other member states, with the launching of the EMU project support for European integration faced a downward path also in Spain. From opposite standpoints, González's strategy towards the EU has been criticized both by the leftist party Izquierda Unida - which was worried about cutbacks in social expenditure and the prevalence of liberalism implied in the convergence criteria - and by its major right-wing competitor Partido Popular -

¹⁸ Overall, in the same period Spanish regions received over 20% of all Structural Fund spending between 1994 and 1999 (ESPON 2005). EU assistance amounted to an average of 0.7% of the GDP annually between 1989 and 1993, which increased to 1.7% per annum on average for 1994-99. Together with the national public counterparts and private sector financing linked to these funds, on average about 1.5% of the annual GDP was mobilized in the context of EU structural assistance during the first period, and about 3.4% during the second period (European Commission 1997).

which criticized González's strategy as largely dependent on EU funds (Powell, 2003). On the other hand, critiques to the Maastricht Treaty started to emerge from regionalist parties, which were arguing that the Treaty was going to reinforce the powers of the Spanish central government.¹⁹ At the same time, negative economic factors had a depressing impact on public opinion, which was characterized by a phase of increasing dissatisfaction between 1991 and 1995. Nevertheless, some authors argue that such an increased dissatisfaction should not be attributed *prima facie* to Maastricht, as citizens' attitudes toward the EU during this period were mainly influenced by unemployment and other domestic issues (Barreiro & Sánchez-Cuenca, 2001). This is consistent with public opinion data for the following years, according to which since 1994 the percentage of citizens who think that membership is a bad thing has remained well below the EU average²⁰ (Jiménez & de Haro, 2011, p. 121).

2.1.3. From Maastricht to the economic crisis (1993-2008)

González III and the 1995 Presidency (1993-1996)

Having lost his parliamentary majority in the 1993 elections, González was forced to rely on the support of the Catalan nationalists led by Jordi Pujol to remain in office. Interestingly enough, Pujol largely justified his support in terms of “the need to guarantee the stability necessary to meet the Maastricht criteria” (Powell, 2003, p. 158), especially in proximity to the 1995 Spanish Presidency of the EU. At the time of the 1995 Presidency, Spain had consolidated its position within the Union. However, due to public apprehensions over the Maastricht Treaty, the climate had turned slightly Eurosceptical, thus reining in the ambitions of EU member states and limiting the value of González's traditionally pro-integration rhetoric. Despite certain continuity, the style of the second Presidency

¹⁹ Nevertheless, despite these criticisms the only party that voted against ratification was the Basque Left (Euskadido Esquerra), whilst all the other Spanish political parties – including IU and PP – increasingly backed the integration process in their statements (see section 2.2. for a discussion on Euroscepticism and political parties in Spain)

²⁰ See par. 2.3.1 for longitudinal trends on the evolution of public opinion vs. the EU in Spain

sounded a rather different note, as outlined by the government's choice to adopt - at least at the symbolic level - a slightly more nationalist tone (Closa, 2002). With the presidency over, Pujol withdrew his support, forcing González to call early elections in March 1996, which he narrowly lost to the Popular Party under the leadership of Aznar.

Aznar's Approach to the EU (1996-2004)

Since the beginning of his office, the main determination of Aznar was to ensure that Spain would be in a position to join the single currency and take full advantage of the EMU. This was possible thanks to the recovery of the Spanish economy after 1996, which allowed Spain to cut public spending, curb inflation, and bring down interest rates in time for the May 1998 Brussels Council, which admitted the peseta into the single currency and the third phase of the EMU. Success in attaining the goal of EMU membership in 1999 opened new perceptions of the role of Spain within the EU, in line with Aznar's own belief. In contrast to González, Aznar and sectors of the PP did not share the view of Spain's twentieth-century history as a period of isolation from Europe, regarding the years of the Franco regime rather as a period of economic modernisation (Torreblanca, 2001). As a consequence, they were significantly less committed to "the mythic belief in Europe which had become a key element of Spain's worldview" (Closa, 2009, p. 504).²¹

During the negotiations leading to the Amsterdam Treaty (1997), in line with González's heritage, the Spanish position was characterized by the rejection of the notion of a 'two-speed Europe', opposition to the notion of 'enhanced co-operation' and a simultaneous struggle to maintain its position as one of the 'big

²¹ Aznar's conviction that Spain was one of the great nations in Europe's history affected as well his negotiation style: in contrast with the strong pro-integrationist and federalist rhetoric of González, both at the Agenda 2000 and Nice negotiations (2001), Aznar adopted a tough and intransigent attitude, where the veto was the main bargaining tool (Closa, 2009). Nevertheless, such a strategy was not without drawbacks: the 2000-2004 mandate "ended with a series of clashes in the European arena: with France and Germany over their lack of compliance with the Stability Pact; with them and other member states over the EU constitution; and with all of these same actors in relation to the Iraq War" (ibid., p. 505).

five' (ibid.). Aznar's fundamental continuity with González's policies was also evident in his efforts to defend the principle of socio-economic cohesion. As outlined by Powell (ibid., p. 162), Spain had always held the view that cohesion was "an integral part of the *acquis communautaire*": in this sense, cohesion was seen as "a principle that should inform all EU policies to take into account the chasm that continued to exist between wealthier and poorer member states".

The first Zapatero Government (2004-2008)

Elected in 2004, the new socialist Prime Minister of Spain José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero promised a change in the Spanish government's policy towards the EU (ibid., p. 503).²² From the Socialist perspective, the policies implemented by the former PP government constituted a retreat from traditional Europeanism that had to be inverted, as represented by the use of the slogan 'return to Europe' during the 2004 electoral campaign.

In summarizing the first Zapatero government, there are two key elements with regard to Europe: the referendum on the EU constitution and the budgetary negotiations for 2007-12, in the light of the Eastern enlargement. With regard to the former, together with Luxembourg, Spain has been one of the main supporters of an EU constitution (the so-called "friends of the constitution"). In fact, not only the adoption of an EU constitution was in line with PSOE's pro-European and federalist position, but the use of a referendum as ratifying instrument fitted nicely with the republican views that Zapatero publicly endorsed (ibid., p. 508). Amongst political parties, the "yes" side was supported by both PSOE and PP and other centre and right-wing regional parties, while IU and left-regional parties sided with the "no" front.²³ The referendum was held on 20 February 2005 and resulted in a blatant victory for the "yes" front (77%, against 17% who voted "no" and 6% blank), but the turnout was very low (42%) - the lowest of any election or referendum in Spain until then). Few months later, the

²² Nevertheless, some authors argue that the difference with the previous Aznar's government was more in symbolic and rhetoric terms than in regard to actual policies (see Closa, 2009).

²³ See section 2.2. for discussion on Euroscepticism and political parties in Spain

adoption of the EU constitution was rejected in France and the Netherlands. After an initial fight to “rescue the constitution” (Navarro, 2007; Torreblanca, 2007) the Spanish government accepted the need to renegotiate the constitution, and at the 2007 summit Zapatero played a key role - together with the leaders of France, Luxembourg, the UK and the German presidency - in developing an agreement that was to eventually become the Treaty of Lisbon (Closa, 2009, p. 512).

With regard to the budgetary negotiations for 2007-12, the recent Eastern enlargement together with Spanish economic recovery opened up the so-called “Spanish problem”. On the one hand, as Spanish GDP per capita was converging more closely with the ones of the other member states, a larger Spanish contribution to the budget was required. On the other hand, there was the fear of a reduction in the share of structural funds received, as a result of the combination between the current increase in Spanish wealth and the existence of more (Eastern) beneficiaries of the same funds (Navarro & Viguera, 2005). Furthermore, an enlargement of the EU would produce a ‘statistical convergence effect’, making Spanish regions suddenly appear richer with the addition of the poorer Eastern regions. Such a problem was framed by the Zapatero’s government as a specific and isolated situation that affected Spain only, the solution to which had thus to be found through a combination of gradualism (i.e. progressive phasing out of cohesion and regional funds) and progressiveness (i.e. paying and receiving in relation to relative wealth) (ibid., p. 514). It is interesting in this regard to see how commitment to territorial solidarity was presented as one of the front-line positions by the Spanish government, as indicated by the 2001 PSOE document on the future of Europe (PSOE, 2001). As outlined by Closa (2009, p. 513-414),

In its view, it is cohesion that forces people to identify themselves as Europeans and determines the ‘identity of identities’ that the European civilising model represents. As such, cohesion not only has a material but also a spiritual element. ‘Why should we join with the Portuguese, Finns or Germans? What values or interests unite us to other Europeans?’ Factors related to cohesion would answer these questions. European civilisation ‘does not allow anyone to be left to their own fate’;

and this is because we have a vision of a cohesive society; a society that believes in solidarity (PSOE, 2001).

As a consequence, Spain has thus a “moral duty” to maintain cohesion and remain committed to solidarity beyond self-benefits, as acknowledged by Navarro and Viguera (2005): “in the same way that Spain benefitted from European funds in the past” there had to be “the goodwill to do the same in the future for countries that may require this even more than Spain did in the past”. Interestingly enough, such a view was not shared only by the pro-integrationist PSOE’s leadership, but as well by a large majority of Spanish citizens: according to an *Elcano Instituto* survey conducted in June 2005, 85% of the interviewed agreed that Spain should show solidarity with the new EU member states that may need EU funds, even though 75% of them considered that the new financial arrangements would not favour Spain (BRIE, June 2005). Ultimately, the so-called “Spanish problem” was solved with highly satisfactory results for Spain, as Spain was allowed to remain in the Cohesion Fund until 2013; furthermore, it obtained additional assistance through help with unemployment in regions phasing out of regional policy, the creation of a Technological Fund specifically for Spain and the funding of migration policy (Closa, 2009, p. 515, see also Torreblanca, 2005).

2.1.4. The years of the economic crisis in Spain (2008-2015)

Between 1997 and 2008 Spain grew about 3.5% per year and unemployment declined from 20.1% to 8% (Magone, 2009, pp. 304-309). In his first legislature (2004-2008), Zapatero’s government managed to maintain the economic stability and success achieved in the previous years. At the same time, he strengthened Spain’s welfare state, as exemplified by the passage of the dependency law. Nevertheless, Zapatero’s second legislature (2008-2011) occurred in an international and domestic scenario slightly different: the dramatic collapse of the US financial market led to a credit crunch in most European countries and ended the speculative boom in Spain fuelled by the construction

sector (Magone, 2016; Royo, 2009; Carballo-Cruz, 2011), driving Spain into the most severe economic crisis experienced by the country in the past 80 years. In 2009 Spain entered in fact a period of recession characterized by negative GDP growth since then. Simultaneously, unemployment reached 24.4% of the active population at the beginning of 2012, while youth unemployment reached a dramatic 48.6% in 2012 (Fundación FOESSA & Caritas, 2012, p. 7). The evolution of the budget deficit as a percentage of GDP was 4.5% in 2008, 11.2% in 2009, 9.7% in 2010 and 9% in 2011, while the government missed the 2012 deficit target of 6.3% of GDP, which had already been increased from a 5.4% target (Field & Botti, 2013, p. 4). Income per capita fell in real terms nearly 9% between 2007 and 2016 (ibid., p. 6), resulting in a rapid increase in inequality since the mid-1990s. The ratio of income corresponding to the wealthiest 20% of the population compared to the poorest 20% went in fact from 5.3% in 2007 to 6.9% at the end of 2010, representing the greatest increase in any EU-27 country (ibid., p. 7). According to a study by Fundación FOESSA and Caritas (2012), the proportion of households that fell below the poverty line in 2011 was 21.8%, a level without precedent in recent decades and which placed Spain among the countries with the most poverty in the EU-31, only surpassed by Romania and Lithuania.

Acknowledged as the architect of a model transition to democracy and economic successes, Spain thus moved to be at the centre of international attention for its economic frailty, extremely high unemployment, and protest movements, such as the Indignados movement (Field & Botti, 2013). Moreover, the economic crisis and the consequent adjustments have simultaneously provoked a severe political and institutional crisis that is still far from being concluded (ibid., p. 2). On the one hand, there is an increasing perception amongst Spanish citizens of the need to reform a political system that is seen as undemocratic, both with regard to the functioning of Spanish institutions and to the representativeness of political parties. On the other hand, these demands have been aggravated by the perception that technocratic European Union economic governance institutions imposed severe fiscal adjustments in order to resolve the

debt crisis (Erne, 2008), the negative impacts of which on social cohesion threaten the stability and characteristics of the democratic system (Molina & Godino, 2013).

If Zapatero's first term in office is known for the extension of civil rights and social protection, the second term passed to history as a period of dramatic cuts to social benefits, reduction of labour rights, rise in unemployment and a reduction of economic prospects and living standards for many. The same path has characterized Mariano Rajoy's (PP) first legislature (2011-2015). Understanding the implications of the crisis for Spanish citizens is of particular interest for our research, especially considering that the intensity of the economic crisis and the resulting attitudes towards the EU are being correlated. In this last historical section we briefly outline the key moments with regards to the recent Spanish economic crisis, focusing both on domestic aspects and on the role played by European institutions. In sections 2.2 and 2.3 we examine in detail the effect of the crisis on the Spanish political system, as Spain's traditional two-party system comes to an end after the 2015 general elections, and on citizens' attitudes towards the EU as mapped by public opinion surveys.

The second Zapatero Government (2008-2012): from Keynesianism to austerity measures

As is well known, the financial crisis began at the global level during the second semester of 2007, as the subprime mortgage scandal emerged. In Spain, its most immediate impact was the imposition of barriers on lending by Spanish banks, which depressed consumption and caused troubles for many enterprises as demand suddenly fell. The consequent cut in purchasing power dramatically affected the construction sector – the most important sector for driving growth during the previous year - the bursting of the “housing bubble” was reflected in the rapid increase in the unemployment rate, going from 7.95% in the second quarter of 2007 to 10.44% just one year later (Molina & Golino, 2013, p. 109).

Although evidence indicating a likely recession was already available to the Spanish government by early 2008, the proximity with the 2008 elections made the first Zapatero government deny the existence of the crisis and the need for

prompt action. When Zapatero was re-elected in March 2008, an increase in the unemployment rate and the deterioration of the labour market became evident, and the government started to acknowledge the existence of a difficult economic situation of “accelerated deceleration” (ibid., p. 110). The economic policies adopted by the Spanish government in reaction to the crisis can be clearly divided into two separate periods: while until 2010 Zapatero opted for a “Keynesian” approach characterized by the use of moderate countercyclical fiscal stimulus measures, since May 2010 the pressure from European institutions turned the government’s strategy towards an austerity-based adjustment policy (Field & Botti, 2013, p. 5).

Table 2.1 summarizes the economic reforms implemented by the second Zapatero legislature. As we can see from the table, the first measure implemented by the new government was a rescue package for the banking sector, increasing the provision of guarantees by 10 million euro (2008). In the same year, the government approved a 55 million euro plan to finance public works with the aim of facilitating the reemployment of construction workers, known as “Plan E”. Nevertheless, none of these measures had the expected effects: the injection of money in the banking sector was not accompanied by an obligation for banks to grant loans to companies and individuals, while Plan E did not address Spanish structural economic weaknesses. The joint effect of a decrease in social security contributions together with an increase in government spending for unemployment and public investment programs led to the rapid growth of the deficit, while the deterioration of labour market conditions urged the executive to introduce a 426 euro unemployment allowance for the unemployed who had exhausted their unemployment benefit rights, known as the Temporary Unemployment Protection and Integration Program (PRODI) (see Molina & Godino, 2013, p. 111).

<i>Reform</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Description</i>
Rescue package for the banking sector	October 2008	Granting of €100,000 million
Plan E	November 2008	Stimulus plan for the construction sector (€55,000 million)
Temporary unemployment protection and labor integration program	October 2009	€426 noncontributory monthly unemployment allowance with six-month duration
Sustainable economy law	April 2010	Policy package aimed at reorienting the economy toward more sustainable activities.
Deficit reduction measures	May 2010	A cut of 5 percent in civil servant salaries. Freeze on pensions. Abolition of the <i>cheque-bebé</i> (baby check)
Labor market reform	June 2010	Reduction of severance compensation. Further limits placed on the use of temporary contracts
Social and economic agreement	February 2011	Tripartite social pact on pensions, active labor market policies, collective bargaining, energy and R&D policy
Pension reform	2011—Agreed in February and passed into law in June	Increase of the retirement age and of the minimum number of working years to have access to a pension
Limit on regional government deficits	April 2011	A limit of 1 percent
Collective bargaining reform	June 2011	Measures aimed at increasing internal flexibility and collective bargaining at company level
Constitutional reform	August 2011	Modifies article 135 and establishes a ceiling for the public administration deficit
Labor market reform	September 2011	Increase of the maximum age for fixed-term training contracts and employment-promotion contracts
VAT reduction for new home purchases	September 2011	Reduction from 8 to 4 percent
Tax on capital gains	September 2011	Reactivation of the tax on holdings over €700,000

Tab. 2.1. *Summary of economic reforms implemented by the Socialist executive, 2008-11.* Reprinted from 'Economic Reforms and the Labor Market: Zapatero's Endless Period in the Wilderness' by O. Molina and A. Godino, in B. N. Field. And A. Botti (Eds.), *Politics and Society in contemporary Spain*, 2016, NY: Palgrave MacMillan. Copyright 2013 by O. Molina and A. Godino.

Until mid-2010, although the worsening of the fiscal position was common to most EU countries – and in particular in Southern Europe²⁴ - strategies to overcome the crisis had mostly been considered as domestic affairs; whereby each country should develop its own policies. This changed in mid-2010: as the debt crisis worsened, European institutions took a more active role and put pressure on the Spanish government to implement significant austerity measures (ibid., p. 112). At the EU summit of 9 May 2010, the Eurogroup required the Spanish government to implement austerity policies aimed at calming financial markets that were attacking the Spanish and Italian debts. Under pressure from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and after receiving personal calls from Barack Obama, Angela Merkel and Hu Jianto, on 12 May Zapatero presented a set of “measures to accelerate the reduction of the public deficit” that included a 5% cut in public employees’ wages, a freeze on wage increases in the forthcoming years and several cuts in social spending – including the non-application of the cost-of-living indexation to pensions and the end of the cheque bebé - which would especially penalise recipients of welfare state benefits and services (De Pino, 2013; see also Fernández-Albertos, 2012). The new austerity measures were accompanied in June by a labour market reform that unilaterally introduced two main changes: a reduction of severance pay and the opening of spaces for company-level agreements to opt out of higher-level agreements. It is important to notice that all these measures were implemented without any public debate, albeit being strongly criticized by trade unions and opposition parties due to their being imposed from outside and the and the government’s economic mismanagement (Molina & Godino, 2013, p. 112). In May 2010 we can thus identify a turning point in Zapatero’s economic strategy: the government definitely abandoned alternative anti-crisis measures more in line with social democracy and the left in general, espousing the neoliberal austerity path advocated by the German government and the European Commission (De Pino, 2013, p. 205).

²⁴ See section 1.2.2. *North vs. South: the financial crisis and the exacerbation of the existing conflict between EU economic “core” and “periphery”* for discussion.

Despite the harshness of the adopted austerity measures, the Spanish sovereign debt problems continued. In the summer of 2011 the ECB sent letters to the prime ministers of Spain and Italy, suggesting for Spain at least eight new reform items to be implemented. On 23 August, without most of his ministers being aware, Zapatero announced the reform of the constitution in parliament to strictly limit the structural budget deficit and borrowing at all levels of administration in Spain, which first and foremost limited the scope of the Spanish welfare state. In September 2011, Article 135 of the Spanish Constitution on public debt was amended, adding to the text the concept of “budget stability” while introducing the absolute priority of debt and interest repayment. A few months later, the so-called “Fiscal Compact” was adopted in 2012, which makes it obligatory for national budgets to be balanced or in surplus in order to avoid the activation of an automatic surveillance mechanism. After Article 135, the Spanish Government approved a law in congress to amend the Constitution to require a balanced budget at both the national and regional level by 2020. As stated in the Article 135 Preamble, the reason for the amendment was to meet Spain’s commitments acquired when joined the European Monetary Union, a framework in which fiscal stability acquires structural value, conditioned to the ability for financial performance of the public administrations. The main purpose of the new Article 135 of the Constitution was thus to subject all public administrations to comply with the principle of budgetary stability, forbidding them to incur a deficit position above the thresholds defined in the Stability and Growth Pact (Estrada-Cañamares et al., 2014).

Partly as a response to the critical economic situation and to the executive’s policies, on 15 May 2011 the Indignados movement arose. Hundreds of protestors took the initiative to occupy and set up camps in main Spanish squares, such as Madrid’s Puerta del Sol and Barcelona’s Plaça de Catalunya, gathering media attention worldwide. Days later, tens of thousands joined the 15-M movement in protest marches across Spain against austerity cuts, the high unemployment and the predicted dominance of the main Spanish political parties

in upcoming regional and municipal elections, favoured by the electoral system (Charnock et al., 2012). As outlined by Field and Botti (2012, p. 8),

The movement activists demand “real democracy” and reject the state institutions that they consider to be dominated by a corrupt political class controlled by bankers. Their criticisms are directed at the system as a whole, as they express particular disdain for the political parties, which they see as undemocratic. [...]

Although the discontent expressed by protestors was mainly addressed to Spanish political and economic elites – so that it would be misleading to interpret the 15M as an anti-EU mobilization - their disappointment was partially a response to the undemocratic imposition of economic policies by the EU and other international organizations as well. As stressed by Field and Botti (ibid.),

Additionally, there is the prevalent view that public policies are imposed by technocrats of the European Union and by Germany, principally, and France, what was referred to as Merkozy, referring to the duo of Angela Merkel, and Nicolas Sarkozy, president of France until 2010.

Ultimately, the role played by supranational institutions in imposing more stringent budgetary rules and even monitoring Spain’s public finances strengthened the perception of a decreased sovereignty at the national level: such a perception had negatively affected Spaniards’ traditional strongly favourable attitude toward European integration²⁵ (Molina & Godino, 2013, p. 113). Significantly, in June 2011 81% of the population declared that they were sympathetic to the Indignados movement and approximately 20% indicated they had participated in some demonstrations, assemblies, or other activities (Garea, 2011).

The first Rajoy government (2012-2015)

²⁵ See section 2.3 for discussion on Spanish citizens’ attitudes towards the EU.

It is in this context of pronounced economic and political crisis that support for the government and the Socialists declined. Socialists experienced a remarkable defeat in the regional elections held on 22 May 2011, losing 4 million voters and attaining their lowest share since the transition to democracy. As a result of the defeat and of his personal unpopularity, Prime Minister Zapatero called for new elections, held on 20 November 2011 and won by the PP's leader Mariano Rajoy. In a context of worsening economic crisis, Rajoy continued on the same path the European authorities had forced Zapatero to undertake: cuts to bring the public deficit under control and structural reforms to encourage growth and employment (Botti, 2013, p. 54). The character of Rajoy's reforms was even more aggressive thanks to increased legitimacy and more support by EU partners compared to the previous Zapatero's government.

A decree law launched by the end of 2011 and approved in January included a wide range of austerity measures, amongst which were: the cut of ministry spending; the cut of spending by regional entities; funding reduction for political parties, unions and employment organizations (-20%); the freezing of public servants' salaries; a limitation to the replacement of retiring civil servants; an increase in the number of hours in a working week and a rise in income tax. In the budget bill for 2012, Rajoy's government confirmed the policies of budget cuts, together with an increase in taxes on companies, capital gains and houses and one in the cost of electricity (ibid.). In addition, there was the need to further flexibilize the labour market through measures focused on reducing the costs of dismissing permanent workers. With this goal three labour market reforms have been implemented since 2011, but the unintended effect was in an increase in unemployment accompanied by a decrease in wages (Magone, 2016, p. 210). Dramatically, the lack of funds also led to a major reform restricting the scope of the Spanish unemployment benefit system: according to El Pais, in February 2015 only the 55.72% of unemployed were covered by unemployment benefits and the average benefit was about 812 euros (El Pais, 6 April 2015).

Despite all these spending cuts, the Spanish economy did not give any sign of recovery. In the first half of 2012 Spain had to cope with massive capital flight, thus becoming dependent on support to its banks from the ECB. As reconstructed by Estrada-Cañameres et al. (2014), over 200 billion euro were injected into the banking sector each month from March to May 2012, until on 9 June the Spanish Government publicly announced its intention to ask for European financial assistance to recapitalize banks. Assistance was officially requested on 25 June, after a soft bailout programme of up to 100 billion euro from the new permanent European Stability Mechanism was agreed upon with the Eurogroup. The European Commission, together with the ECB, the European Banking Authority (EBA) and the IMF assessed and concluded that Spain fulfilled the eligibility conditions. Therefore, they negotiated and eventually agreed with the Spanish authorities the specific financial-sector policy conditions attached to the financial assistance, which resulted in a Memorandum of Understanding on Financial-Sector Policy Conditionality and a Financial Assistance Facility Agreement. As stated in the Memorandum, the main objective of the bailout was “to increase the long-term resilience of the banking sector as a whole, thus, restoring its market access”. However, the text also stressed the fact that “there is a close relationship between macroeconomic imbalances, public finances and financial sector soundness”, and further invited Spain to implement labour market reforms. After a review by the IMF and two independent commissions, an additional sum of 40 billion euro was requested in November 2012 and used for the complete restructuring of the Spanish banking commission.

Although Spain managed to avoid the Troika’s control, the country had to endure a soft Troika arrangement that monitored every three months the progress made in the restructuring of the public sector. Even though the restructuring of the local banking sector still remains to be completed, in January 2014 the Spanish government managed to exit the bailout programme without any precautionary backup funding (Magone, 2016, p. 211).

In this section we have delineated the relationship between Spain and the European Union during the last 30 years, with a particular focus on the

governance of the economic crisis since its burst in 2008. Summing up, as acknowledged by Molina and Godino (2013, p. 116),

the most important outcome of the crisis and the adjustments has been a reconfiguration of state's role in the economy. Austerity policies [...] meant cuts in public services such as transport, education, and health, which are very likely to have a long-lasting impact [...]. Particularly worrying in this context are expenditure cuts in social policies and more importantly public services such as education and health as they are reducing the capacity of states to maintain social cohesion in a context of unprecedentedly high unemployment.

At the same time, the lack of funding at the central level due to the new budgetary rules resulted in conflicts with the decentralised 17 autonomous communities, which were similarly affected by the crisis. The most significant tension in this regard is without doubt with the region of Catalonia, which felt disadvantaged as it was transferring funds to the central government that were badly needed in the region itself (Magone, 2016, p. 212). The crisis thus fuelled a new wave of nationalist claims, culminating in the victory of the Catalan independence coalition Junts pel Sí ("Together for Yes") in the Catalanian parliamentary elections. All these factors have deeply affected the Spanish social and political system, and have severe implications with regard to the attitudes towards the EU, both in the perceptions of Spanish citizens and in the positions of political parties – including most notably the birth of the new anti-establishment, softly Eurosceptic party Podemos. In the next sections we focus, respectively, on the evolution of parties' positions with regard to the European integration and on the transformation of citizens' attitudes towards the EU.

2.2. Euroscepticism and Political Parties in Spain

As outlined in the introduction to this chapter, Spanish parties have often been considered as strongly Europeanist, up to the point that ideological

convergence regarding European integration has been regarded for a long time as one of the key features of the Spanish party system. Nevertheless, such a consensus over European integration is now highly challenged. On the one hand, the general description of the Spanish party system as characterized by a homogeneous position with respect to European integration is generally focused on the two larger national parties – PP and PSOE – but it does not take into account the articulation and channelling of criticisms towards the EU by minor political parties (Gómez-Reino, Llamazares & Ramiro, 2008). As outlined by Gómez-Reino et al., in countries such as Spain, where sociocultural political divides are strong, and where the communist party and organizations close to it have played important and historical roles, it becomes particularly important to take the communist left and peripheral nationalist (“regionalist”) groups into account. On the other hand, the rise of Podemos since the European Parliamentary elections in 2014 seriously questions a view of the Spanish party system – and public opinion – as mainly Europeanist, making it interesting to investigate if and to what extent the “Sleeping Giant” has awoken during the 2015 and 2016 electoral campaigns.

In this section we briefly describe the Spanish political parties taken into account in our analysis, identifying their positioning on the issue of European integration as described by the literature and captured by expert surveys. We first discuss the differences between the two main traditional parties, PP and PSOE. Secondly, we focus on Podemos and Ciudadanos, the two parties that, from different sides of the political spectrum, have “shaken up” the Spanish party system at least since 2015 (Rodon & Hierro, 2016). Thirdly, we consider the communist party Izquierda Unida (“United Left”) and the evolution of its position on the EU from its opposition to the Maastricht treaty until its coalition with Podemos in the 2016 general elections, under the name of Unidos Podemos. Although our analysis limits its focus to these five²⁶ main parties – PP, PSOE, Ciudadanos, Podemos and IU – we conclude this section with a brief note on Eurosceptic tendencies in regionalist parties, which have been excluded both due to language

26 Four in 2016, when Podemos and Izquierda Unida temporarily converged in a single coalition.

barriers and to their overall very limited electoral support. In this regard, it is important to be precise that, although non-mainstream parties such as Podemos have enjoyed increasing support, none of these parties can be classified as overtly anti-European. This clearly contrasts with other European countries where right-wing parties clearly opposed to European integration such as, UKIP in the UK, the FN in France, or AfD in Germany, have enjoyed great support.

2.2.1. PP and PSOE: mainstream parties

In general terms, the Spanish party system has been characterized by a diffuse consensus in favour of European membership and integration throughout the public and across the political spectrum, especially with regard to the two main political parties - the centre-right Partido Popular (PP) and the centre-left Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) (Kennedy, 2006, p. 65). The comparative lack of debate within Spanish society on the question of European integration can be partially explained by the lack of differentiation between the two parties with regard to their preferences about Europe. As mentioned by Vázquez-García et al. (2014, p.100), in fact,

the non-European character of the issue agenda in Spain is a paradoxical consequence of a very high consensus on the virtues and benefits derived from belonging to the EU, and of a notable lack of differentiation regarding European stances on the supply side of the political spectrum. Europe is good, and everybody seems to agree on that. This consensus has a correlate on the supply side of the electoral dynamic. Without exception, all parties compete in the pro-European range of the spectrum.

At the same time, Spanish parties located in this common pro-European space are quite diverse in terms of socio-economic and regional orientation. This shows that agreement on European issues clearly cuts across other axes of competition

– including, notably, the left-right axis – along which competition is more likely to occur (ibid.).

In order to reconstruct the relative saliency accorded to EU-related issues by PSOE and PP, we can rely both on data from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey and from the Manifesto Project. The first dataset includes expert judgments on national parties and the EU (1999-2014), including the saliency attributed by each party to the issue of European integration and its perceived attitude towards the EU. The second dataset also includes party-level data on EU saliency and EU positioning but, differently from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey, the Manifesto Project derives policy positions directly through a content analysis of parties' electoral manifestos. To better understand the differences and commonalities between PSOE and PP with regard to EU saliency, Figures 2.1 and 2.2 present the score assigned to each party by the Manifesto project and the Chapel Hill Expert Survey respectively.

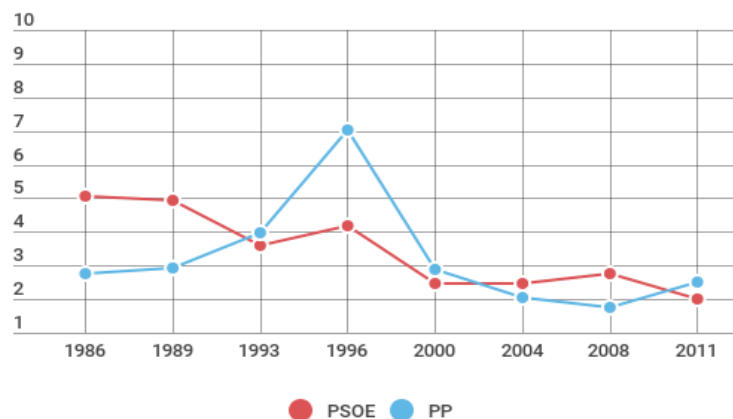


Fig. 2.1. *Parties' aggregate position on the EU over time according to the Manifesto Project.* Source: prepared by the author, using data from the *Manifesto Project*, Version 2016b. Available at: <https://manifestoproject.wzb.eu>

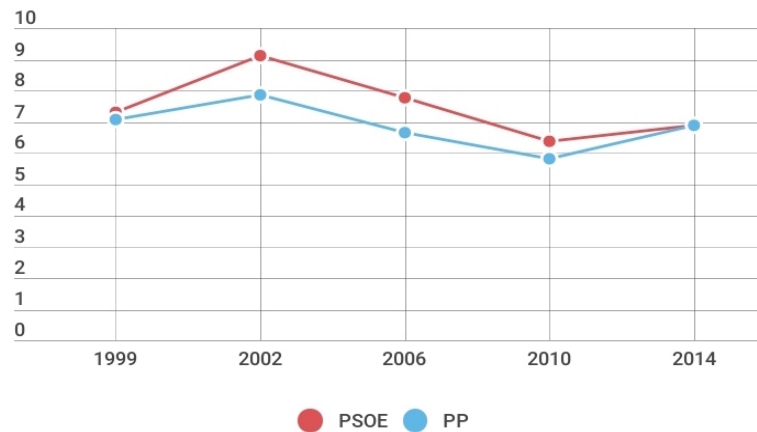


Fig. 2.2. Evolution of relative salience of European integration in the party's public stance according to the Chapel Hill Expert Survey. 11-points scale where 0= European Integration is of no importance, never mentioned and 10= European Integration is the most important issue. Source: prepared by the author, using data from "1999-2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey Trend File." Version 1.1. Available at chesdata.eu.

On the other hand, Figure. 2.3 presents PP and PSOE's positioning on the issue of European integration as measured by the Chapel Hill Expert Survey.

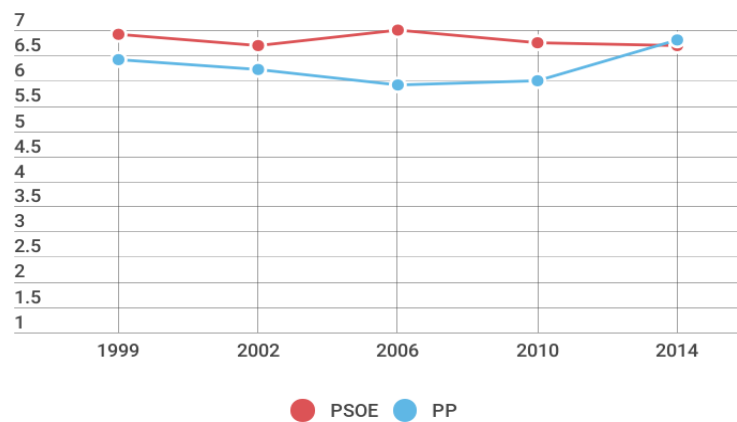


Fig. 2.3. Overall orientation of PP and PSOE's leadership towards European integration (1999-2014) according to the Chapel Hill Expert Survey. 7-point scale where 1= Strongly opposed and 7= Strongly in favour. Source: prepared by the author, using data from "1999-2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey Trend File." Version 1.1. Available at chesdata.eu

If we combine the insights provided by the three figures displayed above, we could draw three main conclusions. First, Figure 2.1 shows a clearly descending trend in the salience that Spanish political parties give to the EU,

which contrasts with the deepening of the European integration process over the same years. Second, although in 1986 the Socialist Party was giving more relevance to European integration than the Popular Party (Fig. 2.1), since Maastricht the two parties have accorded similar salience to EU-related issues (Figs. 2.1 and 2.2), with PSOE overcoming PP only slightly in the past 10-15 years. Last but not least, both parties are overall strongly in favour of European integration, as clearly displayed in Figure 2.3²⁷.

Despite these similarities, PSOE and PP present as well a few differences in their approach to European integration. Historically, the PSOE adopted very quickly a positive vision of European integration derived from its experience of opposition to the Franco regime, while Alianza Popular (AP) (later Partido Popular), which represented the closest group to Franco's ideas after the dictator's death, only partly shared that mythical belief in Europe that has for a long time characterized the Spanish scene. Nevertheless, after accession the PP has assumed the defence of European integration and the inclusion of Spain into the European Economic and Monetary Union as a priority (Vázquez-García et al., 2014, p. 104). Such a shift emerges as well from Figure 2.1, where we can identify a peak in EU salience between early 1990s and early 2000s, in correspondence with the signing of the Maastricht Treaty and Spain's adoption of the euro.

Differences between PSOE's and PP's leaderships can as well be traced back to their competing visions for the future of the EU. If the Socialist Party is in favour of federalism and delegation of power - "Spain must strongly support the project of a political union, becoming a real federation of states and citizens", stated PSOE's 2004 electoral manifesto - on the contrary according to the Popular Party the EU must remain a union of national states and not a federal construction (ibid.). If the PSOE argues that "the only way to preserve our national

²⁷ With regard to parties' positioning towards the EU, although available, we have deliberately avoided presenting data from the Manifesto project. The Manifesto project, in fact, derives party positioning towards European integration by calculating separately the percentage of quasi-sentences positive about the EU (A) and the percentage of negative quasi-sentences (B). Salience is then derived as the sum of A + B (in absolute values), while positioning could be obtained by subtracting B from A. Nevertheless, as in the case of Spanish parties negative quasi-sentences are generally absent, the position derived by subtracting A-B would be misleading, as it would reflect variance in salience more than in positioning.

singularities and the European social model consists in reinforcing the integration path” (2004), according to the PP transfers of competence to EU institutions should be limited to those areas that cannot be efficiently managed at the national level and that could strengthen member states if managed instead at the EU level (Avilés, 2004, 412). As outlined by Torreblanca (2001), the aim of the PP is thus not to reject the EU, but rather to increase the role of Spain in it by becoming more active in proposing at the EU level specific public policies that meet Spanish interests.

The two parties partially differ as well in their conception of EU identity: while PSOE presents it as diverse in cultural terms, but with unique common values, PP boosts an idea of Europe as a community with shared beliefs, characterized by the main principles of freedom and solidarity and Christian humanitarianism (Vázquez-García et al., 2010, p. 207). Moving to other policy areas, we can find differences between the two parties also with regard to their preferences in terms of foreign and security policy. The PSOE has established privileged relationships, most notably, with France and Germany, has been an enthusiastic defender of the integration of Western Balkans and Turkey into the EU and has always attempted to strengthen the relationship between the EU and Latin America, the PP has been characterized by having a strong Atlanticist position, fostering stronger ties with the United States (Vázquez-García et al. 2014, p. 106). Overall, we can conclude that despite the outlined differences, a shared position between the two parties on European affairs seems to exist.

2.2.2. Podemos, Ciudadanos and the end of Spanish bipartisanship

Since the end of the Francoist era, Spain has been characterized by a two-party system dominated by PP and PSOE. Such a bipartisan structure has been put in question by scholars and journalists since 2014, when non-mainstream parties have won around 20% votes at the European Parliament elections and the two mainstream parties have suffered a loss of about 2.5 million votes compared to the 2009 European Parliament elections (Hernández & Fraile, 2014). As the

results of the 2015 Spanish general elections confirm, the main challenges to traditional parties were represented by the new leftist party Podemos and the centre-right party Ciudadanos, a party founded in Catalonia in 2006 and up to 2015 conceived as mainly a regional force (Teruel & Barrio, 2015). Although entering the national arena for the first time, the two parties together obtained 34.6% of the vote, marking the end of the two-party system that had existed in Spain since the restoration of democracy.

While looking for an explanation of such a political earthquake, the effects of the economic crisis cannot be underestimated. Nevertheless, scholars suggest that vote transfers to the new parties (from PSOE to Podemos, and from PP to Ciudadanos) should be rather understood as an effect of the political crisis, as the decision to switch votes to Ciudadanos and especially Podemos is better explained by voters' lack of confidence in political institutions (Orriols & Cordero, 2016). Both Podemos and Ciudadanos focused their respective campaigns on their alterity with respect to the traditional mainstream parties, perceived as corrupt and distrusted by 92.5% of the population (Standard Eurobarometer 84). Nevertheless, although the two parties share a democratic regeneration agenda, they have radically different ideological profiles (Orriols & Cordero, 2016).

Podemos

According to Torcal and Montero (2016), political disaffection is a concept with two dimensions: institutional disaffection and political disengagement. The former is related to voters' lack of confidence in political actors and institutions and the latter to voters' lack of interest in politics. In the context of the euro crisis, the lack of confidence grew in parallel with interest in politics, giving rise to 'critical citizens' (Cordero & Simón, 2016; Norris, 2011; Torcal & Montero, 2016) characterized by a high interest in politics and an extremely low level of trust in political parties (Orriols & Cordero 2016, p. 8). It is precisely this context of institutional disaffection and renewed engagement in politics that explains the rise of the Indignados movement first and of the party Podemos second. As brilliantly

reconstructed by Torreblanca in his book *Asaltar los cielos: Podemos o la política después de la crisis* (2015), in 2012 Spain was in fact deeply affected by a triple crisis: an economic crisis, a social crisis and an institutional crisis, which all together represented the perfect ground for a political earthquake (ibid., p. 28). If the effects of the economic crisis themselves had deep consequences for Spanish society, the factor that turned a situation of economic depression into a social crisis has to be identified as a dramatic increase of the level of inequality, which was far from being natural.²⁸ In this regard, Torreblanca talks about a “breaking of the social contract”, the basic agreement between social classes and generations on which a country is ultimately built, which rupture boosted a new citizens-elite divide characterized by citizens anger against the “disconnection” of traditional political parties from the civil society (ibid., pp. 121-122). If the social and the economic crisis were still not enough to delegitimize the political system, the insurgent corruption activated an institutional crisis which has been crucial for the rise of Podemos. In this regard, Torreblanca argues that if in times of economic wealth society has tended to be tolerant towards corruption, in periods of economic crisis corruption allows people to establish a direct tie between their bad situation, the bad situation in which Spain finds itself, and the corruption of the political elite (ibid., pp. 32-34). “Which better ground for Podemos”, continues the author, “than a country in which the economic crisis is dramatic and citizens do not trust the capability of traditional parties to solve it, whether because corrupted, whether unqualified, whether indifferent?”

Created just a few months before the 2014 European parliamentary election, the new ‘movement-party’ grounded its appeal “against the bipartisanship, corruption scandals and austerity policies dominating the economic crisis” (Cordero & Montero, 2015, p. 365). Formulating its success “from a shrewd combination of social networks, crowd-funding and regular participation in many

²⁸ From the beginning of the crisis, the earning difference between the wealthiest 20% and the poorest 20% of the Spanish population has increased by 30%. Such a dramatic increase is far from being “natural”: if at the beginning of the crisis the relationship between the very rich and the very poor was 5:1 (i.e. the very rich owned 5 times more than the very poor), with the economic crisis the proportion has become 7:1, while in the EU as a whole it has remained steady at 5:1 (ibid., p. 32).

television talk shows” (Cordero, 2015), Podemos was able to attract not only former socialist voters, but also the younger disaffected citizens who had usually been non-voters, obtaining 1.2 million votes and five seats at the European elections and thus establishing itself as the third Spanish party. Hence, reconstructing Podemos’ strategy, Torreblanca (2015) identifies three key distinctive elements. First, the reference to a new form of populism (“populism 3.0”) that closely recalls the strategy adopted by Chavez and Morales in South America and that finds its theoretical reference in Ernst Laclau’s most famous work *On Populist Reason*. Second, a tentative redefinition of the concept of nation, founded on the values of democracy, sovereignty and social rights. And finally, a peculiar organizational model, based at the same time on thematic and territorial decentralization and an extreme centralization of its decision-making and strategy (“hiperliderazgo”, or Leninism 3.0). In line with this framework, despite declaring themselves left-wing the leaders of Podemos have insisted on the irrelevance of the left–right divide for contemporary Spanish politics (Gallego-Díaz & Rivero, 2015), likely in a strategic effort to attract all types of voters (Di Pietro, 2014; Ferrandis, 2014). Such a strategy was lowered in the 2016 election campaign, when Podemos allied with Spain’s traditional radical leftist party Izquierda Unida forming an electoral coalition named Unidos Podemos.

With regard to European integration, Podemos’s discourse has been, since its origins, characterized by claims aimed at regaining popular and national sovereignty, which – according to its leaders – has been taken away by corrupted politicians and unelected actors (the Troika, the German government, the European Central Bank, etc.). Such a discursive strategy can be interpreted as part of the party’s redefinition of the concept of nation, based on the three elements of democracy, sovereignty and social rights. “Sovereignty” is in fact here interpreted not only as “democratic sovereignty”, but also as the State’s autonomy from external forces. In this sense, Germany is often regarded as a “colonial power” that subjugates “the people of Europe”, while austerity policies are accused of “humiliating the homeland”, as Pablo Iglesias stated in his famous speech in Puerta del Sol on 31 January 2015. On the other hand, the construction

of a populist discourse has always been grounded on referring to “the people” as a subject oppressed by an enemy (the anti-people): in this case, the element of opposition is represented by the “financial totalitarianism” that, allied with the European political powers (Merkel; the Troika) and relying on the support of “coward governments” (Rajoy in Spain, Samaras in Greece) acts to seize popular sovereignty (Torreblanca, 2015, p. 155).

This premise notwithstanding, moving to their policy proposals, Podemos’ position with regard to European integration is more blurred and has often been criticized for its lack of coherence, as positions often coexist in its manifestos that respond to different logics (Lupato & Tronconi, 2016). In the case of the 2014 elections, Podemos put forward, on the one hand, proposals aimed at abolishing the Lisbon Treaty (“so that public services are not subject to the principle of competition and neither should they be commodified”); radically reforming the ECB (“conversion of the ECB into a democratic institution for countries’ economic development”); and abrogating specific policies such as the European Higher Education Area, Frontex and Eurosur, or the Return Directive (2008/115/CE) regulating the repatriation of irregular immigrants. On the other hand, it advanced proposals in order to democratize EU institutions, procedures and policies with initiatives such as a European Rating Agency, the exchange of fiscal information between member states, the implementation of an EU Democratic Charter binding all member states with regard to the issues of transparency and accountability, the creation of an EU-wide instrument for popular legislative initiative, and finally the adoption of EU directives against racism and in favour of ecology and animal rights (Podemos 2014).²⁹ Finally, it is worth mentioning that the existence of a core-periphery line of conflict at the EU level is explicitly mentioned in the party’s 2014 programme: according to the party’s manifesto the economic crisis has divided Europe between winners and losers, creditors and debtors, giving rise to different “Europes”. As a consequence, Podemos proposes the creation of

²⁹ Podemos, «Documento final del Programa Colaborativo. Available at: <http://docplayer.es/1333-Podemos-documento-final-del-programa-colaborativo.html>

“specific cooperation mechanisms between Southern European Countries” (Podemos 2014).

In its platform for the 2015 (and then 2016) Spanish general elections, while continuing to insist on the necessity of changes, the party significantly lowered their critical tone towards the EU. For example, instead than calling for an upheaval of the ECB, Podemos now endorsed a statute modification to include additional objectives; overall, it asked for “a reform of European institutions that democratizes the political and economic decision-making in the Eurozone,” and a “profound reform in the Growth and Stability Agreement and Fiscal Pact, eliminating the structural budgetary objectives and loosening the deficit goals” (Podemos 2016).³⁰

Together with party manifestos, two additional data sources can help us to better understand Podemos’s nature with regard to the EU: the preferences expressed by its voters and the voting behaviour of its MEPs at the European Parliament. On the one hand, Podemos’s voters are much more inclined towards European unification than those of other Eurosceptic parties in Europe (Lupato & Tronconi, 2016; Ramos & Cornago, 2016). Also, compared to the rest of Spanish voters, Podemos supporters trust the European Parliament less and blame the EU for the domestic economic situation, but they have more interest in EU topics and are more likely to believe that unification should go further (Ramos & Cornago, 2016). On the other hand, in the European Parliament Podemos’ MEPs vote similarly to the representatives of Eurosceptic parties on key questions (e.g. against the completion of economic and political union, the review of the economic governance forum, and the power of the ECB to impose sanctions; and in favour of a radical shift from austerity policies towards a new sustainable and democratic framework), but in contrast to the British UKIP, the Dutch Party of Freedom, the French National Front, the Austrian FPÖ, the German AfD, the

³⁰ Programa 2016. Available at: <http://lasonrisadeunpais.es/programa/>

Danish People's Party, the Greek Golden Dawn and even the Italian 5SM, they do not support exiting the euro.³¹

In conclusion, if it is then true that the party highly criticizes the EU institutional architecture and some of the most important European policies – and first and foremost those related to the implementation of austerity measures – it is also true that in other fields Podemos calls for “more Europe”, asking for more intrusive EU regulation in some policy areas together with more democratic institutions and procedures (Lupato & Tronconi 2016). By combining a strong criticism of the present state of the European integration process – neoliberal, economy-oriented and lacking democratic legitimacy – together with a defence of a stronger and more democratic role for the EU, the party ultimately qualifies as a “soft” Eurosceptic party (Taggart, 1998; Taggart & Szczesniak, 2002) or, according to Kopecký and Mudde's typology, as “euro-critical”,³² i.e. a party that supports the general idea of European integration, but is pessimistic about the EU's current and/or future reflection of this idea (Kopecký & Mudde, 2002).

Ciudadanos

The electoral success of Ciudadanos can be explained as the result of a double failure of the “electoral market” at two different levels. On the one hand, the predominance of nationalism in Catalonia left unsatisfied demands amongst voters who had rejected nationalism and the emphasis on identity issues shared by most of the local political establishment (Lago & Martínez 2011, p. 8; see also Lago, Montero & Torcal, 2007). On the other hand, during the last Rajoy government (2011–15) demands for political renewal, transparency and democratic regeneration arose from PP's unsatisfied electorate (Teruel & Barrio, 2015, p. 2).

³¹ Together with the Greek Syriza. Source: <http://politikon.es/2016/12/29/spanish-disaffection-with-the-eu-is-podemos-eurosceptic/>

³² In their typology, Kopecký and Mudde actually call the parties combining Europhile and EU-pessimist positions “Eurosceptics”, in opposition to “Eurorejects”, who combine Europhobe and EU-pessimist stances. For the purpose of clarity we prefer for the former the use of the term “Euro-critical”, in line with the argument proposed by Lupato and Tronconi (2016, p. 3)

From its rise in 2005 until 2014, Ciudadanos was considered a Catalan regional party. Nevertheless, starting from 2012 the constraints of the economic situation led the new PP government, headed by Mariano Rajoy, towards a rapid decline in popular support. Party corruption aggravated the political situation, involving a number of representatives from PP and PSOE, and fostered voters' anger and dissatisfaction against both traditional and mainstream parties (ibid., p. 8). As smaller parties were able to attract unsatisfied voters only to a limited extent, the situation opened up an opportunity for Ciudadanos to "go national" at the European parliamentary elections and, one year later, at the 2015 general elections, when the party obtained 14% of the votes.

By refusing the left and right labels and adopting a catch-all strategy, the party has been characterized by ideological ambiguity since its inception (ibid.). Ciudadanos's main focus has undoubtedly been on the fight against corruption and the need for political and democratic regeneration, to be pursued by modifying the regulations on political parties and party finances in order to guarantee greater transparency, as well as by reforming the public administration and depoliticizing judicial institutions (ibid., p. 9). On the other hand, in its campaign for the 2015 and 2016 elections the party placed a great emphasis on the economy issue, proposing measures to fight unemployment and fiscal reforms. In this regard, Ciudadanos' most controversial proposal is a pro-business labour market reform, which would introduce a single-contract employment model with the aim of reducing the difference between "insiders" (who now have high levels of social protection) and "outsiders" (low levels of social protection) in the market (ibid.). Regarding the Spanish internal centre/periphery cleavage, Ciudadanos defends the decentralization model based on the 'state of autonomies', but is willing to reform the model by setting a clearer distribution of competences amongst state and regions.³³ Overall, although opinion leaders and voters from other parties tend to place Ciudadanos closer to the right, such a

³³ In particular, the party is in favour of reforming the Senate and the regional financing system - eliminating the Basque and Navarre fiscal autonomy - and of eliminating some political levels such as the Diputaciones, the second tier of local government (ibid.).

policy platform does not support the idea of a clear right-wing ideological bias. Nevertheless, the rise of Ciudadanos in Spain since 2014 has mainly been due to voters leaving the PP, and in recent years the party has expanded amongst the centre-right electorate.

Coming to Europe, the party now presents itself as “deeply committed to the EU”, favouring a stronger European Union with a federal perspective, supporting a common European framework to regulate issues like immigration and sitting with the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe at the European Parliament. According to the Chapel Hill Expert survey (Polk et al., 2017), in 2014 the party leadership had an overall orientation that was extremely positive towards the EU (6.67 on a 7-point scale), accorded a medium salience to European integration in its public stance (6.60 on an 11-point scale, similar to PP and PSOE), strongly favoured the internal market (6.17 on a 7-point scale) and the EU cohesion policy (6.75 on a 7-point scale) and was only moderately in favour of EU authority over member states’ economic and budgetary policies (5 on a 7-point scale; in the same year, PSOE was located at value 5.22 and PP at value 5.56). Nevertheless, in the campaign for the 2009 European parliamentary elections the party was running in coalition with the conservative pan-European Eurosceptic formation Libertas, suggesting that at least in its early attempts to enlarge its electorate the party’s position with regard to the EU was highly contradictory (ibid., p. 8).

2.2.3. Peripheral parties and euroscepticism in Spain: the case of Izquierda Unida (IU), the peculiarity of regionalist parties and the lack of far-right parties

The Spanish two-party system was traditionally characterized by the presence of two types of minor political groups: the state-wide and the non-state-wide parties. Among the former, the most important has traditionally been the ex-communist Izquierda Unida (IU – The United Left), a coalition of left-wing parties that incorporates the communist, feminist and green parties.

*Izquierda Unida (IU)*³⁴

Izquierda Unida is a left-wing organization founded by the Communist Party of Spain (PCE) in 1986, in cooperation with other minor political forces, as a consequence of the electoral failure of the PCE in the 1982 elections. Born as an electoral coalition, the party quickly began a process of institutionalization and organizational development in which the PCE leadership maintained a prominent role. Since its formation, the goal of Izquierda Unida has been to represent a combination of traditional left-wing stances and classical “new left” issues such as environment, peace and feminism, thus including in their electoral platform both materialist – workers’ rights, unemployment, defence of the public sector and of the welfare state – and post-materialist issues – such as minority and women’s rights, increase of democratic control, accountability of the policy process and defence of the environment (Gómez-Reino et al., 2008).

With regards to the EU, amongst the nationwide formations IU has undoubtedly been the least favourable to the European integration project and the least stable in its attitude over time. In the 1980s, unlike other communist parties in Europe, the PCE exhibited a moderate stance in its discourse on Spain’s accession to the EU (Álvarez-Miranda, 1996; Avilés, 2004), distancing itself from Moscow and being amongst the first theorists of “Eurocommunism”. Overall, at the time IU considered that it would have been worse to be out the integration process than to be part of it (Jiménez & de Haro, 2012), while some of its concerns towards the EU resurfaced after accession. In the years after, the party expressed deep concerns about the Maastricht treaty, to the point that it presented a rejection amendment and abstained in the parliamentary ratification vote. The critical position adopted by IU was due to the prevailing of a neoliberal model of the EU, which in the case of Maastricht was exasperated by the worry of

³⁴ Please notice that, when presenting our hypotheses and findings in Chapter 3, 4 and 5, most of the times we refer to Izquierda Unida as “Unidad Popular”, being it the name of the electoral coalition lead by Izquierda Unida at the time of the 2015 Spanish general elections. In 2016 the party converged instead in another electoral coalition, “Unidos Podemos”, including - together with Izquierda Unida - other minor parties from the left and, most notably, Podemos.

cutbacks in social expenditure and by the party's ideological opposition to the liberalism implied in the convergence criteria (Jiménez & de Haro, 2012, p. 114-115). In the following years, the party criticized the EU with regard to two main issues: its lack of democratic legitimacy, due to the minor role played by the European Parliament in the legislative process and to the lack of mechanisms for citizens' participation in EU politics (the so-called "democratic deficit"), and its strongly liberal economic orientation. Although the issue of the democratic deficit remains crucial, the main criticism is the one related to the EU's economic model, to the point where the party voted against both the Amsterdam (1997) and the Lisbon (2008) treaties, abstained during the voting of the Nice Treaty (2001) and campaigned against the adoption of a European Constitution in the 2005 referendum (Capdevila et al., 2005, see also Jiménez & de Haro, 2012).

Nevertheless, IU's opposition to the EU is definitely "contingent and qualified" and directed not towards the European project per se, but to "the way in which European integration is currently developing", thus qualifying as a soft rather than hard Eurosceptic party (Taggart, 1998; Taggart & Szczesniak, 2002), guided more by reformist appeals than by a principled opposition to the EU (Gómez-Reino et al., 2008, p. 135). The party is in favour of European integration, but supports a model of the EU that:

guarantees a European social model and the economic and social rights associated to the welfare state, political independence from the USA, and solidarity with the Third World countries (Gómez-Reino et al., 2008, p. 142).

In this sense, IU rejects the independence of the European Central Bank – seen as a clear attack against the people's sovereignty – calls for a democratization of European institutions, favours a common foreign policy guided by the principles of peace and solidarity, requires a stronger emphasis in the social aspects of integration and supports a common fiscal policy that limits free capital circulation (ibid., p. 143).

Besides the state-wide Izquierda Unida, a second group of minor parties was composed by non-state-wide, nationalist parties active in Catalonia, in the Basque country and in Galicia. Although these parties were always confined to a very small share of parliamentary seats and are thus not included in our analysis, it worth mentioning that both the Galician Nationalist Block (BNG), the Basque left-wing nationalists and the Catalanian Republican Left have taken more or less soft Eurosceptic orientations, due on the one hand to their ideological distance from the EU “pro-market and pro-capitalist agenda” and on the other hand to the reluctance to open real institutional channels for peripheral nations manifested by the EU institutions along the years (Gómez-Reino et al., 2008, p. 146).

The lack of far-right parties

Finally, it worth mentioning that, in contrast to most Western European countries, in Spain no party represents the instances of the populist radical right, i.e. rallying against immigration and multiculturalism, supporting welfare chauvinism and tending to be at odds with the process of European integration (Mudde, 2007). Although also in Spain there are several parties that could fit such a definition, none of these parties has obtained more than one per cent of the total Spanish vote in any national election since 1980 (Alonso & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2015, p. 23). In trying to explain such an exception, reasons seem to be found more in supply-side than in demand-side factors. In fact, although some demand-side factors – the temporal proximity with the Francoist regime, together with a tradition of emigration and the sharing of a common language with Latin American immigration – might have played a role in making Spaniards’ attitudes towards immigrants favourable (Carbajosa, 2015), at least until the economic crisis Spanish citizens were no more tolerant than their Western European neighbours³⁵ (Alonso & Rovira Kaltwasser 2015, p. 31). On the contrary, scholars points at three main supply-side factors which can help to explain the absence of far right parties in

³⁵ Nevertheless, with the economic crisis, immigration was no longer considered a major problem and attitudes towards immigration softened (ibid.).

Spain: first, a cleavage structure characterised by an entrenched conflict between peripheral and state nationalisms, making it difficult for new parties from the right to play the “nativist” card; second, a mainstream right-wing party (PP) that until now has been able to obtain the support of far-right voters, leaving little space for the establishment of new far right political forces; finally, an highly disproportional electoral system, which discourages the rise of new parties regardless of their electoral agenda (ibid., p. 40).

If these reasons might be sufficient to account for the lack of far-right parties in Spain, an additional factor might conspire to explain the difficulty faced by parties willing to politicize the issue of welfare chauvinism, i.e. the restriction of welfare benefits to Spanish citizens. If it is true that the austerity measures imposed since the beginning of the economic crisis have deeply affected the extent of the Spanish welfare state, in the previous decades Europeanization had in fact had a great impact in Spain’s social policies development, acting both as a general benchmark for achieving a closer convergence at a faster pace compared with longstanding EU member states (Risse, Cowles & Caporaso, 2001; Moreno, 2013) and as a direct source of social standards, as in the case of the emergent European “social dimension” (Ferrera, 2005). The positive role played by EU inputs - together with the financial assistance provided by EU structural and cohesion funds – in the establishment of a functioning welfare system and a social infrastructure in Spain may thus have limited the credibility and the appeal of right-wing parties capitalizing on the issue of welfare chauvinism.

As we discuss in the next chapter, the lack of far-right parties in Spain represents a European “anomaly” that needs to be taken into account in the formulation of our expectations with regard to type of opposition to the EU carried out by Spanish citizens and political parties.

2.3. “Is the EU a good thing?” Citizens’ attitudes towards the EU across time

In section 2.1 of this chapter we extensively examined the evolution of the relationship between Spain and the EU from its accession in 1986 until the present day. On the other hand, in section 2.2 we provided a description of the Spanish party system, focusing again on parties' attitudes towards European integration and their policy preferences. In this final section we focus on public opinion patterns, using longitudinal data from Eurobarometer to describe the evolution of citizens' attitudes towards the EU across time. Finally, we include results from a recent RESceEU survey (2016)³⁶ to depict the situation in Spain at the time of the elections in the light of the four lines of conflict outlined in Chapter 1.

2.3.1 A disenchanted support for the EU? Evidence from Eurobarometer longitudinal data

With regard to monitoring citizens' attitudes through public opinion surveys, the most acknowledged source in Europe is likely Eurobarometer, the Public Opinion Analysis sector of the European Commission. Since 1974, Eurobarometer has carried out more than eighty Standard Eurobarometer Surveys and over a thousand quantitative and qualitative surveys, thus becoming widely regarded as a reference point for European public opinion. For our purpose, we have taken into account a set of questions that have been asked repeatedly over the years in order to identify public opinion trends in Spain with regard to several aspects of citizens' attitudes towards European integration.

On the one hand, we have focused on "relational" aspects reflecting citizens' general perceptions of the EU, namely their level of trust in the European Union and their *image of the EU* (positive/negative). On the other hand, we have also taken into account questions dealing specifically with Spaniards' *attitudes towards Spain's EU membership*, including perceived benefits, opinions about the

³⁶ For a detailed presentation of the RESceEU survey see Ferrera, M. and Pellegata, A. (2017), *Can Economic and Social Europe Be Reconciled? Citizen Views on Integration and Solidarity*, report available at www.resceu.eu.

common currency and their agreement with the statement “Spain could better face the future outside the EU”. Figures 2.4 and 2.5 display the evolution of, respectively, citizens’ trust in the EU and their image of the EU. In terms of trust, a downward path has clearly emerged since 2008, when the level of trust starts to descend. Starting from 2010, the negative answers overtake the positive ones, with a majority of respondents declaring they distrust the EU. A peak in distrust occurs in 2014, when the percentage of people that distrust the EU reached 82.6%. Since 2014 the distance between the percentage of people who distrust the EU and those who trust it has got closer, but in 2016 distrust is still prevailing by +27 percentage points.

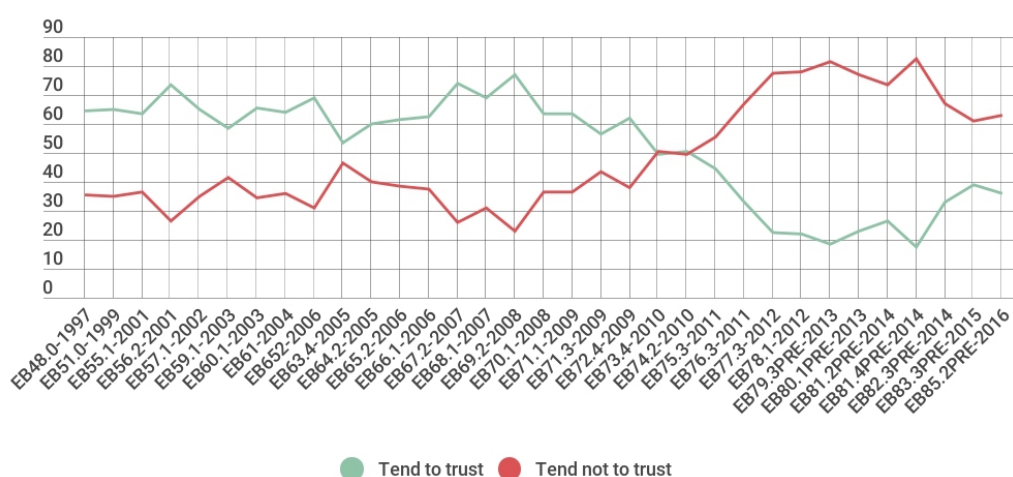


Fig. 2.4. Trust in the European Union in Spain, 1997-2016. Source: prepared by the author, using data from Eurobarometer.

We can identify a similar trend in Eurobarometer data on citizens’ “image of the EU”, which can be positive, neutral or negative. As in the case of citizens’ trust, their image of the EU is highly positive until 2008. From 2008 positive answers start to decrease, in correspondence to an increase in negative (and neutral) answers. In this case, the overtaking occurs in 2011 (EB 77.3), when negative views reach 33.7% against 22.9% positive views. Importantly, a high share of people have a neutral view of the EU (44.4% at the end of the period surveyed). Interestingly enough, negative views remain prevalent until 2014, when positive answers again overtake the negative ones. Significantly, the years in which Spain was hardest hit by the economic crisis thus correspond to the only

period in which the number of respondents with negative view of the EU was higher than that of those with a positive view; with Spain exiting the bailout programme in 2014, positive views started to increase again.

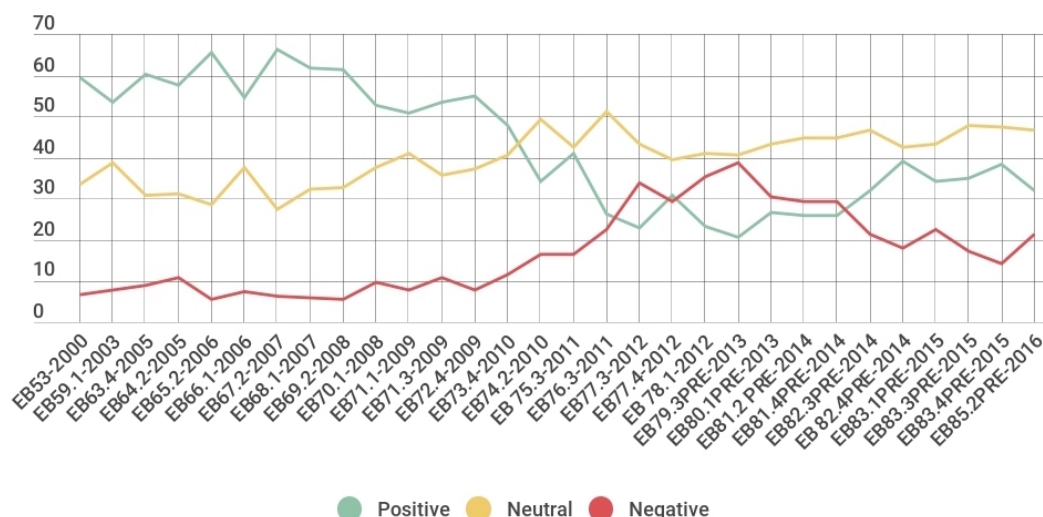


Fig. 2.5. Image of the European Union in Spain, 1997-2016. Source: prepared by the author, using data from Eurobarometer.

Although the effects of the economic crisis are evident in all the analysed questions, trends in citizens' attitudes towards *Spain's EU membership* appear somewhat different, as we can see from Figures 2.6, 2.7 and 2.8. Starting from Figure 2.6, we can see how a large majority of respondents answered positively to the question "Taking everything into consideration, would you say that Spain has on balance benefited or not from being a member of the EU?" The only period in which the percentage of negative answers ("not benefited") overcomes that of positive ones is between 1992 and 1995, just after the signing of the Maastricht treaty.³⁷ If it is true that a "crisis effect" has emerged since 2010, the idea that Spain has mainly benefited from EU membership remains the majority view.

³⁷ Nevertheless, as outlined in section 2.1.2, it is not clear whether the depressing impact on public opinion has been caused *prima facie* by Maastricht, or was a result of internal negative economic factors (Barreiro and Sánchez Cuenca 2001).



Fig. 2.6. Perceptions on country benefit from EU membership in Spain. Source: prepared by the author, using data from Eurobarometer.

A similar trend emerges with regard to the question “Generally speaking, do you think that your country’s membership of the EU is a good/neutral/bad thing?” (Fig. 2.7): although in correspondence with Maastricht (1992-1995) and the current economic crisis (2010-2013) we have the lowest difference between positive and negative views, support for membership remains highly prevalent, at least until 2013.

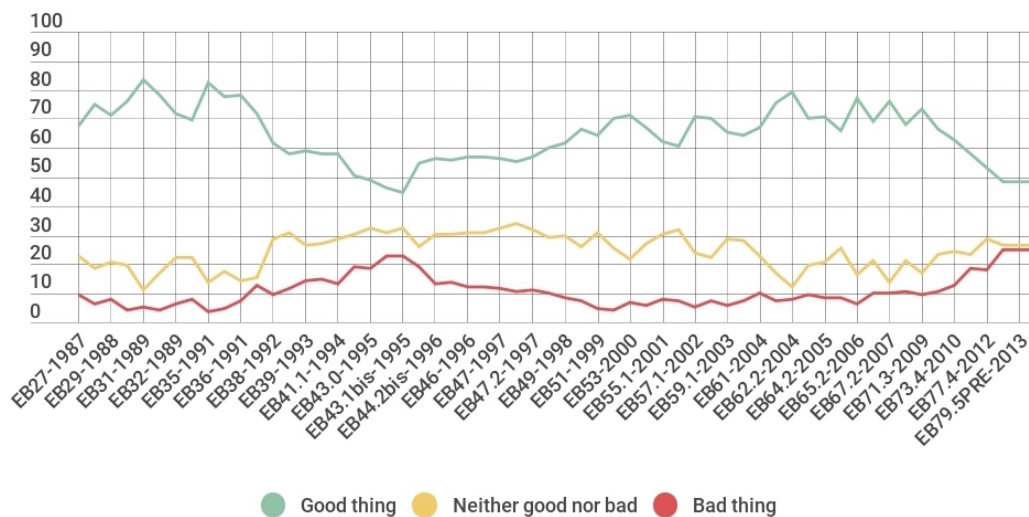


Fig. 2.7. Attitudes towards EU membership in Spain. Source: prepared by the author, using data from Eurobarometer.

Finally, in Figure 2.8 agreement vs. disagreement to the statements “Spain could better face the future outside the EU” and “[are you in favour of or against] a European economic and monetary union with one single currency, the euro” are represented. Unfortunately, answers to these questions are available only for the years 2012-2016, so that it is difficult to control for a “crisis effect”. Nevertheless, if read together with the previous figures, Figure 2.8 can help us to draw an interesting picture of Spanish public opinion towards the EU. Although about the 30% of respondents pronounce themselves against the euro and agree that Spain could better face the future outside the EU (28.7% and 30.4% respectively according to EB85.2PRE-2016) – a result that strongly questions the idea of an “homogeneous consensus” around European integration amongst Spanish citizens – such a proportion appears very small if compared with that of those who declare they distrust the EU (63.7% in EB85.2PRE-2016, but most notably 82.6% in 2014). Such a finding suggests that trust in the EU and attitudes towards either EU membership or a common currency are not necessarily a consequence of the same rationale: in 2014 82.6% of respondents distrusted the EU, but only about 30% were actually thinking their future would be better outside the EU and/or the common currency.

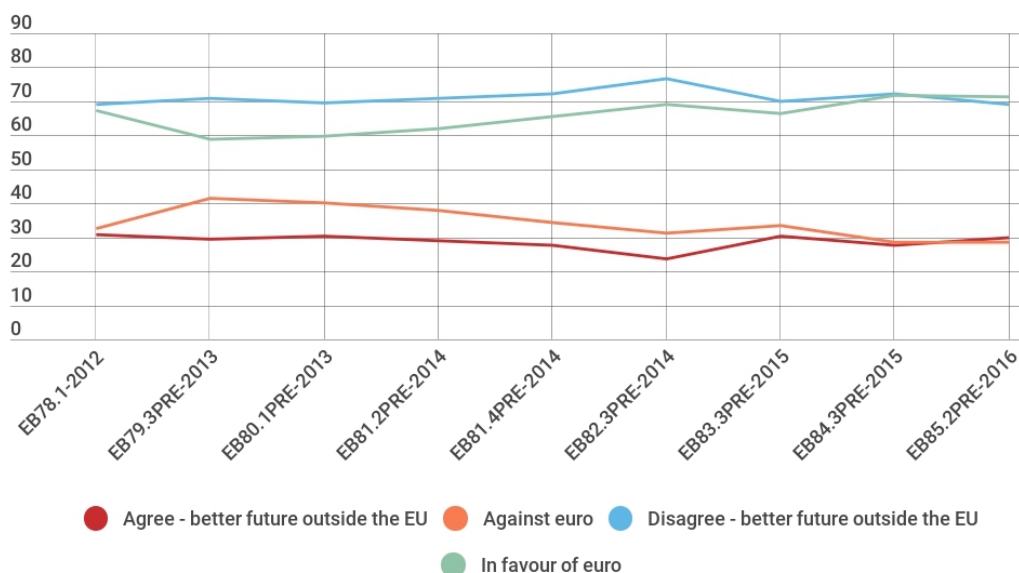


Fig. 2.8. Attitudes towards the euro and views over exiting the EU in Spain. Source: prepared by the author, using data from Eurobarometer.

Our results from Eurobarometer are in line with those obtained by Fernández-Albertos and Kuo (2016) using data from an original public opinion survey to describe the structure of preferences toward the euro as a common currency and austerity policies in Spain. Interestingly, the authors found out that, in spite of the depth and the duration of the economic crisis, support for Spain's membership in the Eurozone has remained strong. A similar finding is presented in Hobolt and Wratil's *article Public opinion and the crisis: the dynamics of support for the euro* (2015), in which the authors investigate how the crisis has affected the nature of attitudes towards the euro in several EU countries, starting with our same assumption that the euro area crisis has presented the EU with its most acute challenge to date, pitting creditor states against debtor states and bringing the negative consequences of monetary integration into focus. Interestingly, also in this case results show that support for the euro has remained high within the euro area, although attitudes are found out to be increasingly driven by utilitarian considerations, whereas identity concerns have become less important (ibid., p. 244). The implications of the public opinion dynamics presented in this section for our research are thus not linear: if on the one hand the recent crisis and its management have deeply affected Spaniards' attitudes towards the EU, determining a peak in distrust and an increase in the share of people who have a negative image of it, on the other hand the percentage of respondents against the euro and EU membership remains steady at the value of 30%, with the percentage of those who "strongly" agree that Spain would face a better future outside the EU being limited to 8.7% (EB 85.2 PRE).

2.3.2. Conflicts over European integration in contemporary Spain: results from the 2016 REScEU survey

In presenting our theoretical framework in Chapter 1, we have proposed and identified four lines of conflict as structuring the political debate over the EU: (a) a left-right cleavage at the supranational level, opposing market-making and market-correcting policy preferences at the EU level; (b) a integration-autonomy

conflict, whereby the defence of national social sovereignty is in contrast with the increased role of EU conditionality; (c) a tension opposing free movement and national closure, which is relevant with regard to the issue of intra-EU mobility between high-welfare and low-welfare member states; and finally (d) a fourth conflict opposing core and peripheral member states, and first and foremost payers and beneficiaries of cross-national transfers.

Before proceeding, in the next chapter, with the introduction of our research design, in this final section we complete our overview of Spaniards' attitudes towards the EU by presenting a brief comparison between Spain and five other European countries (France, Germany, Italy, Poland and Sweden) with regard to their placement along the four axes of conflict, relying on data from the recent REScEU survey (2016).

Market-making vs. market-correcting

Figure 2.9 represents citizens' positions on the market-making vs. market-correcting line of conflict in the six member states under examination. Preferences are detected through citizens' answers to the question *In your opinion, which of the following objectives should be given top priority at the EU level?* The answer "Ensuring fiscal stability as well as the international competitiveness of the EU industry" has been regarded as a preference for market-making positions at the EU level, while preferences accorded to "Ensuring high levels of social protection and social welfare for all EU citizens" have been considered as displaying a market-correcting orientation (see figure on the next page).

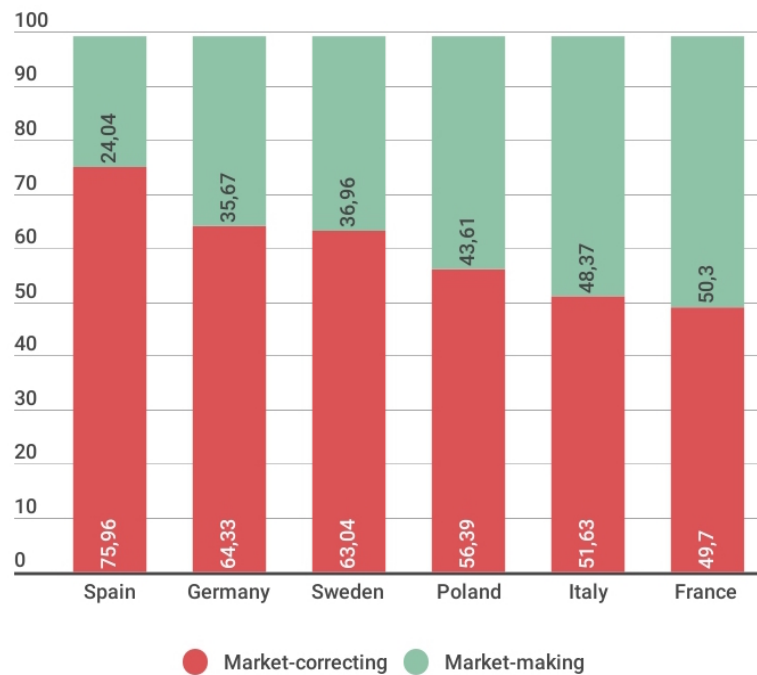


Fig. 2.9. Top priorities at the EU level, country percentages.

As we can see in Figure 2.9, although market-correcting positions prevail in all the countries except for France, Spain is the country in which the lead of the market-correcting pole is higher, with 75.96% of respondents being in favour of market-correcting orientations, against a percentage of 24.04% supporting market-making instances.

Core vs. periphery

To monitor citizens' positioning along the core-periphery line of conflict, respondents have been asked to select, from a list of options, the statement closer to their view with regard to the following question: *During the recent Eurocrisis, a number of member states in severe economic and financial conditions have asked for help from the EU. This has led to the adoption of new common rules on the provision of financial support to heavily indebted countries. Please, indicate which of these statements comes closest to your view. Financial support from the EU should...* Respondents have thus been provided with six possible replies: a) ...be granted without conditions, in the name of solidarity between EU citizens and states; b) ...take the form of soft loans, because

Europeans are “all in the same boat”; c) ...be accompanied by precise conditions for repayment and domestic policy reform, so as not to put the Monetary Union at risk; d) ...be offered voluntarily only by those countries that consider it to be in their national interest; e) ...not be provided because member states should take responsibility for their own problems instead of asking money from foreign taxpayers; f) ...not be a task for the EU to deal with. In order to provide a meaningful interpretation of citizens’ positioning, we have thus recoded citizens’ preferences as “Toward solidarity” (option a) and b), “Conditionality” (option c), “Toward self-help” (option d) and e) and finally “Not a EU task” (option f).

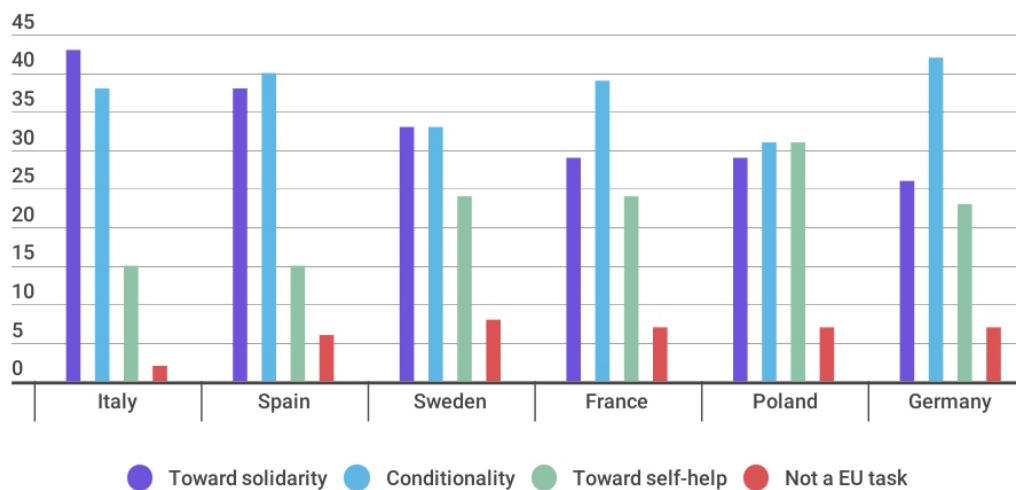


Fig. 2.10. Conditions to be given financial support from the EU, country percentages

As we can see from Figure 2.10, the two Southern (“peripheral”) European countries present in our sample – Italy and Spain – are those in which the share of responses “Toward solidarity” is higher, being equal to 43.91% in Italy and to 38.19% in Spain. At the same time, these countries are those in which respondents have accorded the smallest amount of preferences to the options “Toward self-help” (Spain: 15.69%) and “Not an EU task” (Spain: 6%). Although significant differences amongst member states exist, it is important to notice that in all countries except Italy the majority of respondents consider that financial support from the EU should be accompanied by precise conditions for repayment and domestic policy reform, to avoid putting the Monetary Union at risk.

The more favourable position of Southern European countries towards cross-national transfers is confirmed by Figure 2.11, where Italy and Spain are the countries with the highest levels of agreement with the statement *The EU should equip itself with a budget large enough to provide substantial financial help to member states facing a sudden rise in unemployment rates*, a view shared by over 90% of respondents in both countries.

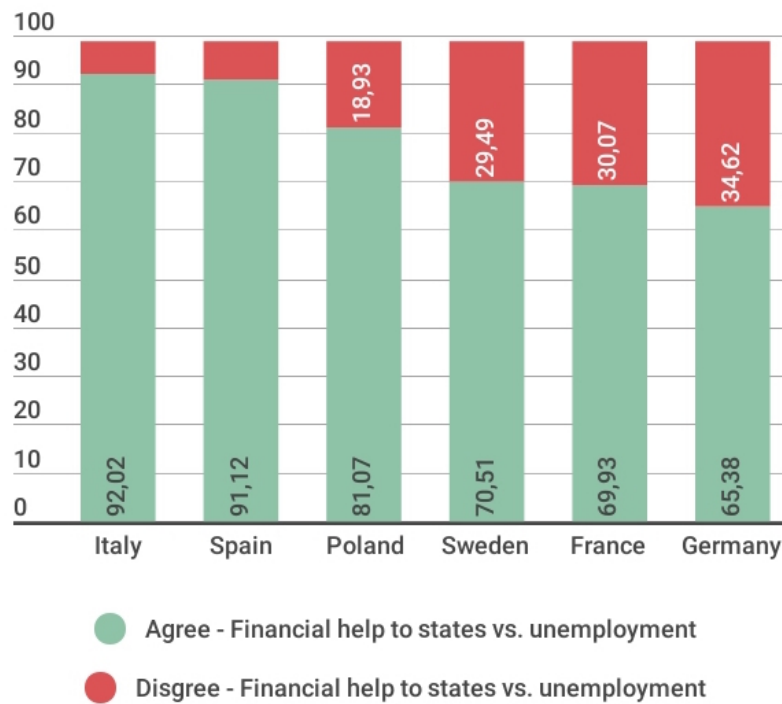


Fig. 2.11. Agreement with EU giving financial help to states that face a rise in unemployment, country percentages.

Finally, Spain characterized itself as the country where a higher proportion of respondents declared that they had participated in or were possibly willing to join anti-austerity demonstrations (Fig. 2.12). The proportion of citizens who had already joined an anti-austerity demonstration is particularly high – 14.51% - which might be explained by the great involvement of Spanish population in the anti-austerity Indignados movement back in 2011. Significantly, if we consider together those who have already joined an anti-austerity demonstration and those who are considering participating, we can see how austerity is strongly opposed by the 66.3% of respondents.

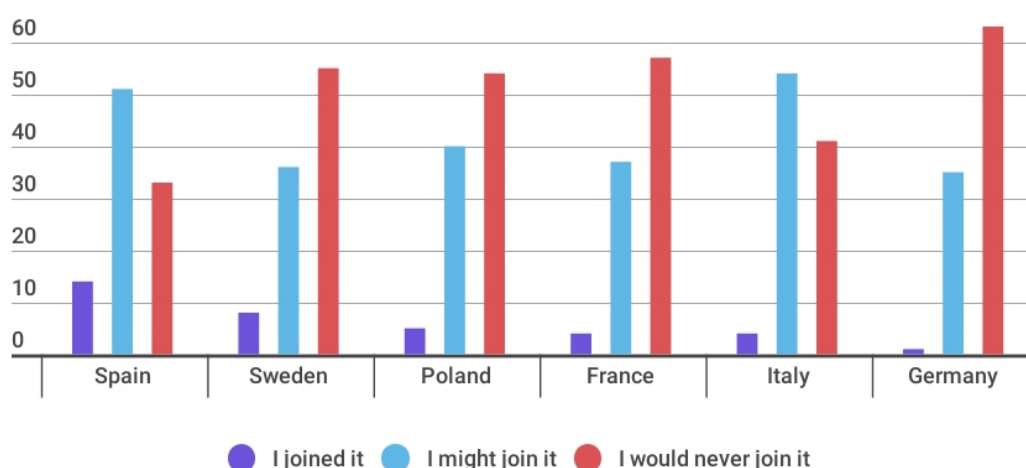


Fig. 2.12. Participation in public demonstrations against financial austerity policies, country percentages.

Free movement vs. national closure

In the previous pages we have seen how the first and second lines of conflict examined seem to be actually relevant in Spain, with an high percentage of citizens in favour of a more market-correcting orientation at the EU level and feeling solidarity towards countries who are facing financial difficulties. These two issues have been highly politicized since the beginning of the economic crisis and differ across countries. On the other hand, results displayed in Figures 2.13 and 2.14 suggest that, in contrast to what happens in other countries, intra-EU migration does not seem to be a great issue in Spain, both with regard to access to the labour market³⁸ (Fig. 2.13) and to social protection³⁹ (Fig. 2.14).

³⁸ Responses to the question: *How do you think that EU citizens of other nationalities that come to work in our country should access the labour market?*

³⁹ Responses to the question: *Which of these three statements on the access to social security benefits by citizens of other EU member states comes closest to your own point of view?*

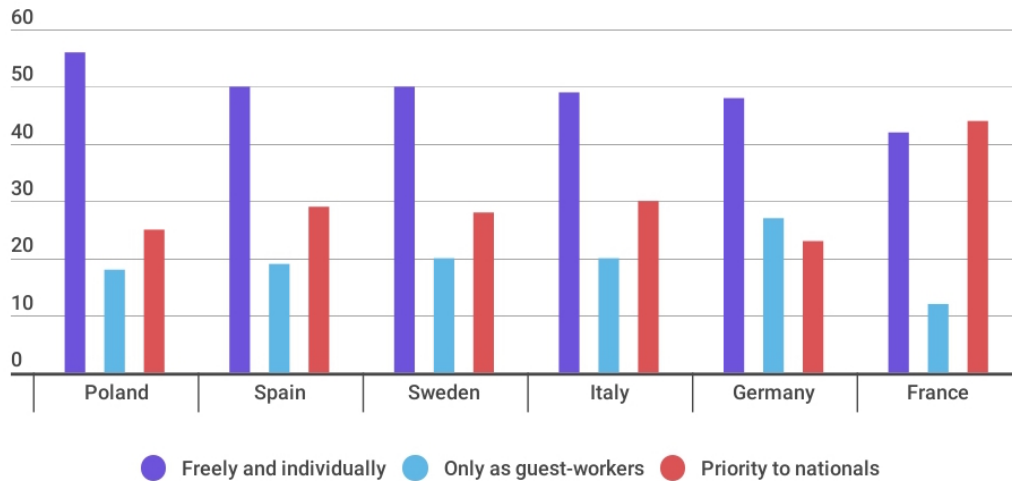


Fig. 2.13. Conflict on intra-EU free movement: access to labour market, country percentages.

More than half of respondents (50.74%), in fact, consider that EU citizens from other EU countries should access labour market freely and individually, while according to the great majority of the population access to social benefits should be guaranteed to legally resident foreigners. As mentioned in section 2.2.3, the positive role played by EU inputs - together with the financial assistance provided by EU structural and cohesion funds – in the establishment of a functioning welfare system and a social infrastructure in Spain may thus have concurred to prevent – at least for the moment - the politicization of the issue of welfare chauvinism.

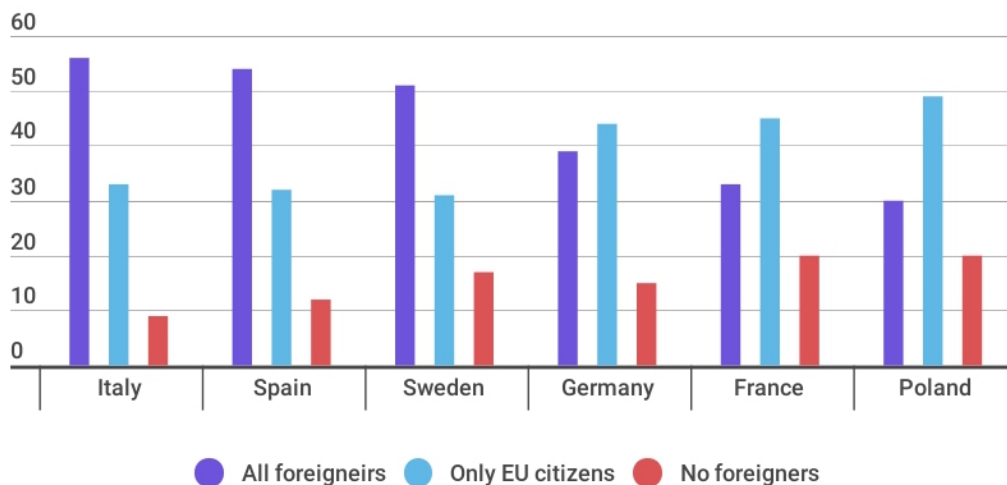


Fig. 2.14. Conflict on intra-EU free movement: access to social protection, country percentages.

According to 54.26% of Spanish respondents the same social security benefits granted to Spaniards should in fact be extended to “all foreigners legally resident”, while 32.84% consider that such an extension should be limited to nationals of other EU member states only. Interestingly enough, the proportion of citizens against the extension of social security benefits to any type of foreigners is rather small (12.9%): at least according to survey data, not only there is no trace of a “Polish plumber” issue in Spain, but the immigration issue seems to play only a very marginal role as well, in contrast to what emerges from other European countries.

Integration vs. autonomy

Finally, Figure 2.15 represents Spaniards’ preferences with regard to the strengthening of European integration. As we can see from the figure, amongst the analysed countries Spain is the one in which the idea that European integration should be strengthened is shared the most, with 67.33% of respondents considering that integration should get stronger, against 10.64% who think EU integration has gone too far.⁴⁰

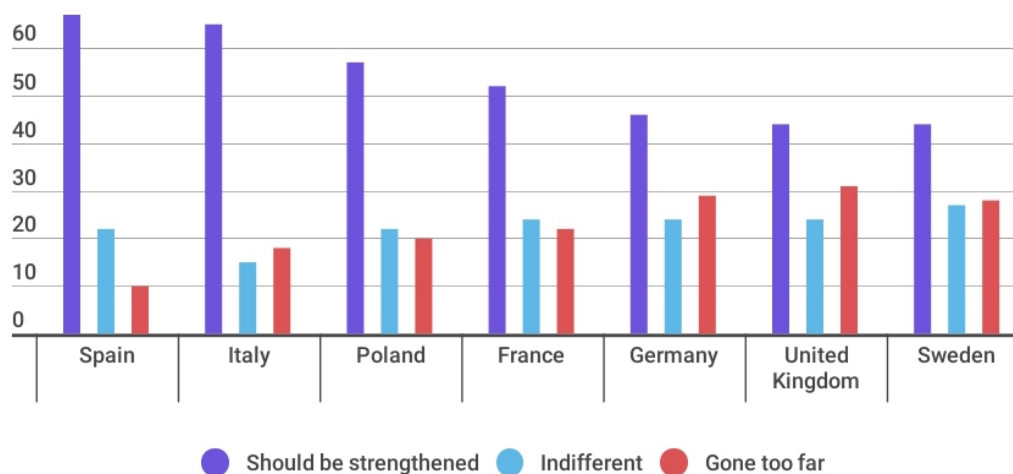


Fig. 2.15. Preferences over European integration, country percentages.

⁴⁰ Positions are derived by respondents’ answers to the following question: *Some people say the process of European unification should be strengthened. Others say it has already gone too far. What is your opinion? Please indicate your position using an 11-point-scale where '0' means unification "has already gone too far" and '10' means it "should be strengthened". Values 0-4 have thus been recoded as “Integration has gone too far”; 5 as “Indifferent” and 6-10 as “Integration should be strengthened”.*

By relying on the existing literature and on different data sources – the Chapel Hill Expert Survey, the Manifesto Project, Eurobarometer and the 2016 REScEU survey - in this chapter we have extensively reconstructed the relationship between Spain and the EU in terms of history, parties and public opinion trends. Summing up, Spain emerges as a country with a long-term pro-European tradition that has recently been raised for discussion by the financial crisis, which has caused a decline in citizens' trust in and image of the EU. According to the 2016 REScEU survey, citizens' criticisms do not point at European integration per se, but rather ask for an EU that shows more solidarity towards poorer countries, reject austerity and manifest a preference for market-correcting orientations at the EU level. On the other hand, at least according to survey data, differently from other European countries the conflict between free movement and national closure does not seem to play a great role in Spain. Drawing on the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 1 and on the specificity of the Spanish context as presented in this chapter, in Chapter 3 we finally present our research design.

CHAPTER III. A Twitter-based Research Design to investigate EU Politicization

Until recent years, public opinion research on European integration had been mainly based on survey data. As outlined in Chapter 2, the most acknowledged source in Europe is likely Eurobarometer, the public opinion analysis sector of the European Commission. In addition to Eurobarometer, in the last decades several public and private institutes have been carrying out comparative surveys in selected European countries, with focuses that widely vary according to the diverse institutions' research objectives. Nevertheless, survey data about the European Union have been sometimes criticized for answering questions that are not related to the respondents' life-world perceptions and experiences (Eder, 2011).

On the other hand, a large field of study has approached the analysis of public opinion in Europe from the supply side, focusing on the types and degrees of party positions on Europe (Kopecký & Mudde, 2002; Szczerbiak & Taggart, 2008a; 2008b). Besides expert surveys, analyses of the supply side have mainly relied on data from the *Manifesto Project*, which analyses parties' election manifestos in order to study parties' policy preferences. Nevertheless, as outlined by De Wilde, Michailidou and Trenz (2014a, p. 3), survey analysis and party position measurements would be well complemented by studies of *Europe's public spheres*, especially in light of complex demands on how the political project of European integration and the EU polity ought to be publicly justified⁴¹ and the highly idiosyncratic shape of national discourses.⁴²

Finally, a significant stream of research on politicization has focused on news coverage in order to monitor the relative salience and contentiousness of EU-related issues across different countries and in different time frames (Hutter,

⁴¹ See also Morgan, G. (2005). *The idea of a European superstate: Public justification and European integration*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

⁴² See also Diez Medrano, J. (2003). *Framing Europe: Attitudes to European integration in Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Grande & Kriesi, 2016; Grande & Hutter, 2014; Grande & Hutter, 2015; Hoeglinger, 2016; Guineadeau & Palau, 2016 amongst others). The focus on content analysis and mass media has undoubtedly many advantages, as the field has already produced a body of relevant data and findings which are comparable (Zürn, 2016). Nevertheless, as outlined by Zürn (2016), the media system has its own logic that is at least partially different from the political one, as many salient and contested issues discussed in mass media are utterly apolitical and, on the other hand, not all relevant aspects of the political are reported in the media (*ibid.*, p. 166).

All of the three types of data presented above – mass surveys, party manifestos and elite surveys, content analysis – are indeed essential sources of information to study EU politicization. Nevertheless, no one of the listed sources allows *per se* an investigation of the three dimensions of politicization (i.e. salience, contentiousness and expansion to the public), so that most empirical research focuses on some specific aspects of EU politicization. Salience and contentiousness are thus often investigated in regard to the media or the political elite, but without taking into account the parallel preferences of the general public. On the other hand, although the use of survey data to monitor public opinion towards the EU is particularly useful in the analysis of EU contentiousness, it significantly limits our possibility to investigate the salience of EU-related issues for the general public.

Only in the last few years, public opinion scholars have started to approach the Internet as a precious source of data on EU attitudes. There are two main reasons why Internet-based data can potentially open up new avenues for research on politicization: on the one hand, the Internet (and social media in particular) represents an unprecedented source of freely available, up-to-date data; on the other hand, the interactivity that characterizes Web 2.0 – and, again, social media platforms especially – has enhanced two-ways forms of communication, which can potentially allow for the investigation of the three different facets of EU politicization.

Nevertheless, until now the potential of Internet-based data for researching public attitudes towards the EU has been exploited only to a limited extent. The majority of works investigating either Europeanization or EU politicization have restricted their focus to specific types of online news media such as blogs and online newspapers, analysing both their articles and the user-produced contents present in their comment spaces (De Wilde et al., 2013; De Wilde et al., 2014a, De Wilde et al., 2014b amongst few others). Only very few studies have drawn on social media data to analyse public attitudes towards the EU (Bartlett et al., 2014; Ceron, Curini & Mainenti 2015; Barisione & Michailidou, 2017).

As outlined by Ceron, Curini & Mainenti (2015), measuring public opinion towards the EU through social media analysis presents several advantages. On the one hand, on social media the possibility of analysing in detail citizens' trust towards EU institutions is enriched by the opportunity of monitoring their attitudes in real-time, thus enabling the researcher to acknowledge eventual patterns emerging in reaction to specific events. On the other hand, on social media one can find a huge amount of data (big data), which have emerged as the result of citizens' will to freely express their opinions and not in reaction to pre-formulated questions as is the case with surveys. "There are now more opportunities to listen than ever before", state Bartlett & al. (2014). "EU citizens have transferred many aspects of their lives onto these social media platforms, including politics and activism. They use social media to discuss news stories, join political movements, organize new political movements and broadly discuss and dissect those public issues that matter to them, across boundaries and at essentially no cost [...]" (Bartlett et al., 2014, p. 9).

At the same time, the choice of focusing on social media has as well its limitations. According to a report released by Twitter in 2016, in 2015 Spanish Twitter users were mainly males (54%, against 46% female users) and highly educated (41% hold a university degree). Twitter is as well more popular amongst young and middle-aged users – with 78% of Spanish users being less than 45 years old - while older people are still under-represented on the platform (only 6% are more than 55 years old). Other studies also suggest that Spanish Twitter users

tend to live in urban rather than in rural areas (Delgado, 2016; The Social Media Family, 2015). The risk of potential socio-demographic biases thus calls for some carefulness when generalizing to the overall population the results of social media research.

In this chapter we introduce our research design to investigate EU-politicization in national arenas on the basis of Twitter data. In the first section, we present Twitter as a data source for political research, from its technical affordances to the way in which studies have employed Twitter data to study elections. As the focus of our work is on the Spanish case, we also briefly discuss existing works dealing with previous political, administrative and European elections in Spain. In the second part of this chapter, we present in detail the research design at the basis of our study, the results of which are presented in the second, empirical, section of this work (Chapters 4 and 5).

3.1. Twitter as a data source for political research

3.1.1. Twitter: an introduction

Twitter is a free messaging service on which users can compose and publish short messages (maximum of 140 characters) called tweets. Created in 2006 by a team of programmers who had worked in blogging and podcasting, the San Francisco-based company is the largest micro-blogging service and the third-largest social networking site, reporting 320 million active users by January 2016 according to the yearly report Digital in 2016 from We Are Social (2016).

While private, direct messaging (DM) to individual users constitutes one component of the service, tweets qualify as public forms of communication as they are visible to any user by default. The public modes of communication typical of Twitter are made up of three additional forms (Moe, 2012, p. 1224). Replies and mentions allow for a tweet to be directed to specific users while remaining public, by inserting '@user id' in the text; retweets (RT) make up a second form of public

address, as they facilitate the distribution of messages (see below); and finally hashtags allow for the thematic tagging of messages by inserting the hash symbol (#) followed by words or acronyms in the tweets.

Especially in the early embrace of Internet research by social and political scientists, researchers have sometimes had the tendency to consider the variegated mix of websites, platforms and applications that populate the net as a unique, coherent cyberspace. On the contrary, different platforms present radically different socio-technical characteristics, the affordances of which influence users' behaviour and, consequently, the type of knowledge that we as researchers can reach: much as data retrieved through an anonymous interview are different from those we might obtain from the same respondent participating to a focus group, we can expect similar dynamics to influence the same online users while operating in different digital contexts (Baym & Boyd, 2012; Rogers, 2013).

As a result of its public character and its specific affordances, Twitter has achieved particular relevance as a medium of political communication for four main reasons: (a) posts are visible to every user by default (i.e., unless differently specified); (b) content is easily sharable and can quickly spread in the network by using the retweet function; (c) the system of hashtags and mentions allows the creation of publics around specific discussions without the need for group creation; and finally (d) users can follow a particular account without asking the permission of its owner (Colleoni, Rozza, & Arvidsson, 2014).

How do these features facilitate political communication? First of all, differently from Facebook, tweets are public, thus providing public awareness to all users on the medium rather than being restricted to one's friends. This clearly affects the type of content that users decide to publish on the platform: as quoted by Murthy in his book *Twitter* (2013):

Facebook is composed of my photos. MySpace is composed of my favourite music. Twitter is composed of everything inside my heart -
@GirlsProverbs

Secondly, an important function is played by retweets. Followers can retweet political leaders' tweets, and leaders can retweet their followers' tweets. As followers who retweet a political leader's message can create a snowball effect that allows a leader to communicate with a larger audience than leaders could assemble on their own, being retweeted becomes a relevant goal for any politician. Thirdly, as tweets can be directed at specific individuals – politicians included - Twitter is unique in facilitating interactions across discrete social networks. This form of directed interaction is particularly powerful as, again, all discourse is public and its audience is not limited to the explicitly specified interactants: often, individuals tweeting are “putting on a show for others to see” (Murthy, 2013 p. 3). On the other hand, the use of hashtags allows for any tweet to be included into a larger conversation consisting of all tweets that contain the same hashtag, thus facilitating impromptu interactions of individuals participating in these conversations (ibid.). Finally, in contrast to the reciprocated ties typical of Facebook's network, on Twitter one does not need to be on a first-name basis or even to know other users to follow them. For this reason, Twitter is both a social and a newsy medium (Kwak et al., 2010), allowing not only for symmetric social graphs but as well for non-symmetric *interest* graphs based on non-symmetric relationships (Ravikant & Rifkin, 2010; see also Colleoni, Rozza, & Arvidsson, 2014).

3.1.2. Studying elections with Twitter data: four main approaches

The potential of social media as a political communication platform became of public interest in the 2008 U.S. presidential election, when some commenters claimed that Barack Obama's use of social media played a key role in his victory (Hendricks & Denton, 2010; Williams & Gulati, 2008). Since then, politicians' use of social media – in terms of adoption rate, as well as of posting frequency and professionalism – has rapidly increased, thus opening up new avenues for political research. Although the amount of studies focusing on the impact of Twitter on the different aspects of a country's political and electoral sphere is facing a

constant and rapid increase, research in the field has remained until now highly fragmented, both as a consequence of the novelty of the method and of the combination of research from different academic fields – which can thus be based on very different theoretical and methodological backgrounds.

In the first systematic attempt to review the existing literature relying on Twitter-based data, Jungherr (2015; 2016) has identified three main research areas: (a) the use of Twitter by politicians and activists; (b) the use of the platform by the public(s) during electoral campaigns (both in terms of content and with regard to their *interactional practices*); and (c) the online reactions during mediated events, such as TV debates and conventions. The first category includes a significant amount of research focusing on the reasons behind politicians' decisions to open Twitter accounts (see e.g. Golbeck, Grimes & Rogers, 2010; Peterson, 2012), on the ways in which accounts are used by politicians (see e.g. Graham et al., 2013) and finally on the effects of such a form of communication on the general public. On the other hand, the second stream of research includes studies addressing the political use of Twitter by normal users (Twitter publics, as defined by McKelvey et al., 2014) during electoral campaigns. Included in this category are studies on the interaction networks between politically active Twitter users (see e.g. Conover et al., 2011a; Himelboim et al., 2013), research attempting to identify and categorize users' published contents (through the use of more or less automated techniques of text analysis such as machine learning and topic modelling - see section 3.2.2 for discussion on methods) and finally a smaller but significant group of works dealing with both survey and Twitter data, thus allowing researchers to relate users' Twitter activities with variables typical of traditional electoral research (see e.g. Barberà et al., 2013). The third research area would, on the contrary, include studies on audiences' Twitter activities during mediated events such as TV debates (see e.g. Chadwick, 2013; Lin, Keegan, Margolin & Lazer, 2013). Finally, a fourth category intentionally excluded by Jungherr which is worth mentioning is constituted by the ever-increasing amount of studies aimed at identifying statistical models able to forecast electoral results on the basis of Twitter data (see Gayo-Avello, 2013 for an extensive discussion of

the topic).

3.1.3 Insights from the Spanish Twittersphere

As outlined in the previous paragraph, the amount of research focusing on the political use of Twitter in electoral periods is quickly increasing. In Spain, Twitter has been used for political communication at least since 2010 (Congosto, 2015), becoming an established media tool in the November 2011 general elections (García Ortega & Zugasti Azagra, 2014). As a consequence, political use of Twitter has also become an area of inquiry, and in recent years researchers have attempted to investigate the Spanish political Twittersphere from several perspectives.

The first studies that took into account Twitter as a means of political communication focused on the 2010-2011 local elections. In their pioneering study, Congosto, Fernández and Moro (2011) investigated the relationship between number of mentions and share of votes received by each party competing at the 2010 Catalan elections, suggesting the existence of a correlation. On the other hand, while focusing on the use of Facebook and Twitter by political parties during the 2011 local elections in Madrid, Abejon, Sastre and Linares (2012) found out that the impact of social media was rather limited as the candidates understood the importance of being online, but they did not understand its true use. The 2011 local elections were also at the core of a study by Criado, Martínez-Fuentes and Silván (2012), in which the authors investigated the extent and determinants of the communicative success of mayoral candidates. Finally, in another study on the use of Twitter in the 2011 local elections, Izquierdo (2012) focused on online interactions between candidates and citizens, concluding that candidates' actual interaction was rather low, both due to candidates' inability (or lack of desire) to respond, and due to scarce interest in engaging with them manifested by the public(s).

A second group of studies on the political use of Twitter in Spain has emerged after the 2011 general elections. Also in this case, studies focus on the

first stream of research outlined by Jungherr (2015; 2016), mainly dealing with the reasons behind politicians' decision to open a Twitter account and even more with the ways in which accounts are used by politicians. Amongst these, we recall Zamora and Zurutuza's study (2014) on PP and PSOE candidates' use of Twitter during the 2011 electoral campaign, in which the authors conclude that more than adapting their communication strategies to the dynamics of Twitter, candidates tend to reproduce their parties' political discourse on Twitter with no regard for interactions with their public(s). A similar finding was obtained by Aragón et al. (2013) analysing the reply and retweet networks of seven political parties and concluding that all parties – and especially the major traditional parties – were still tending to use Twitter as a one-way communication tool. Despite this general conclusion, other studies (García Ortega & Zugasti Azagra, 2014; Zugasti Azagra & Sabés, 2015) suggest that – especially if compared with the previous local elections – candidates do have a desire to respond when addressed on Twitter by other people. As a result, they tend to discuss a wider variety of topics than those set by the campaign strategy, and stray from the arguments and issue agenda previously set. Finally, Gámir (2016) shows a complete map of activity on different social media by the leaders of PP and PSOE, focusing once again on their communicative patterns.

On the other hand, in a few of these studies we can see for the first time in Spain an attempt to investigate not only the communicative aspects, but also the specific *issues* debated online by the same politicians. By performing quantitative content analysis, Zugasti et al. (García Ortega & Zugasti Azagra, 2014; Zugasti Azagra & Sabés, 2015) identify the 15 most-mentioned topics in the tweets of Mariano Rajoy (PP) and Pérez Rubalcaba (PSOE). According to the authors, except for campaign-related tweets (which per se represented almost the 50% of the sample), the most debated issues in 2011 were social rights (12.7% on average), the economic crisis (12%) and other economy-related issues (9.4%). Less debated (percentage < 2% each), but still present in the tweets of the two candidates were the issues of electoral participation, electoral law, the state of autonomous communities, corruption and political scandals, the situation of

women, immigration, energy, terrorism, infrastructures, housing and the 15M.⁴³ Similar findings have been obtained by Zamora Medina and Zurutuza Muñoz (2014), according to whom the most debated issues were social policy, the economic crisis and other economic problems (percentages > 10%), followed at a distance by immigration, corruption and terrorism (all < 3%). While it is not surprising to see social and economic issues at the top of the agenda, for our purposes it is interesting to see that, at least according to the tweets sent by Rajoy and Rubalcaba, issues related to European integration did not enter the 2011 electoral debate.

More recently, scholars have analysed the use of Twitter by Spanish candidates during the 2014 European parliamentary elections. In this regard, Congosto (2015) focuses on the different publics interacting with candidates on Twitter, identifying two separate communities of users: one composed of endogenous followers who engage with politicians in a partisan fashion and undertake to answer and reinforce candidates' messages, and a second group of normal users that pay sporadic attention to politicians' messages. At the same time, López-García et al. (2015) compare the Twitter activity of the main Spanish political parties, focusing both on their messages and on their online behaviour. On the one hand, the authors identify a difference in the online behaviours of new (Podemos, Ciudadanos and Vox) versus traditional parties (PP, PSOE and IU). On the other hand, the campaign resulted in being focused primarily on domestic issues, despite the elections being for the European Parliament. Interestingly enough, the focus on national issues was even more pronounced in the tweets from Pablo Iglesias (national issues: 43%; European issues: 4%), from whom we could have expected a higher interest for EU-related issues considering his strong criticism of the current state of the European Union. Nevertheless, as outlined by the authors in a passage on the online strategy of Podemos and Ciudadanos,

⁴³ The Spanish anti-austerity movement, which takes its name from the 15 May 2011 demonstrations, when tens of thousands of protesters took to the streets all over Spain. See cap 2 for further discussion on the 15M.

the reason behind this strategy seems clear: both candidates are interested in promoting their parties not only for the European parliamentary elections, but even more with a view to the forthcoming electoral elections. It's for this reason that they primarily present themselves as an alternative to the existing parties, with new proposals aimed at breaking radically with the status quo in a context of increasing political disaffection. In this regard, the best strategy to get the electorate's attention - both with a view to these elections and to the future of the party - is likely to talk about the issues most able to capture citizens' interest, which in the context of the European elections were more related to national than European politics (López-García et al., 2015, p. 239).⁴⁴

Ramos-Serranos, Fernández Gómez and Pineda (2016) achieved similar results by reconstructing in detail the full range of topics discussed on Twitter by the official accounts of the main Spanish political parties. Their findings are reported in Table 3.1 (see table on the next page). As we can see from the table, albeit being the second most debated topic, 'Europe' does not emerge as an issue of primary importance, and in particular not in the tweets from Podemos.

Finally, López-García (2016) recently published the first study dealing with the political use of Twitter during the 2015 Spanish general elections, focused on the tweets sent by the leaders of the four major Spanish parties (PP, PSOE, Ciudadanos and Podemos) competing in 2015. Once again, findings suggest different behaviours carried out by new as opposed to traditional parties. Candidates from emerging parties tended to send messages to mobilize their supporters to campaign and to make generic announcements regarding their

⁴⁴ Original text: 'La razón de este planteamiento parece clara: ambos buscan posicionar su partido con vistas no tanto a las Elecciones Europeas, sino a los procesos electorales que esperan en un futuro próximo. Para ello, se postulan como alternativas a los partidos ya existentes y, además, como propuestas rupturistas y novedosas en el contexto de la desafección política creciente que se ha extendido entre los españoles en los últimos años. La estrategia más adecuada para captar la atención del votante, de cara a estas elecciones y como partido al que tener en cuenta en el futuro, parece pasar por hablar al público español de los temas que más le interesan, y que en el contexto de las Elecciones Europeas tenían más que ver con la política nacional que con la europea' (López-García et al., 2015, p. 239)

future victory and the arrival of political change, while the leaders of PP and PSOE tended to publish more messages with specific policy proposals.

Tweet topic	Podemos	PP	PSOE	Vox	IU	UPyD
Animal rights	0.12%	0.15%	0.00%	0.00%	0.07%	0.42%
Civil and human rights	2.74%	0.58%	5.95%	0.45%	4.10%	2.92%
Crime and judicial proceedings	0.30%	2.92%	1.29%	0.23%	1.04%	0.67%
Business and economy	5.65%	13.99%	8.15%	1.58%	15.31%	5.10%
Education	0.30%	0.29%	0.13%	0.23%	1.63%	1.75%
Environment	0.06%	0.00%	0.13%	0.00%	0.33%	1.84%
Europe	2.68%	11.95%	23.42%	0.45%	10.10%	18.71%
Government	9.70%	4.08%	1.03%	4.50%	5.34%	3.17%
Health and social welfare	2.44%	6.41%	6.21%	3.60%	2.93%	3.43%
Immigration	0.65%	0.15%	0.78%	0.00%	0.72%	1.34%
Military and defence	0.00%	0.29%	0.00%	0.23%	0.13%	0.17%
Religion	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.23%	0.33%	0.00%
Science and technology	0.06%	0.73%	0.13%	0.23%	0.26%	0.50%
War and conflicts	0.00%	1.46%	0.00%	1.35%	0.20%	0.33%
World events	0.24%	0.00%	0.13%	0.23%	0.85%	0.17%
National events and heritage	1.31%	1.17%	1.42%	1.80%	0.59%	1.75%
Infrastructure	0.12%	0.00%	2.33%	0.00%	0.13%	3.68%
Campaign and party affairs	59.13%	51.46%	41.27%	76.58%	41.82%	38.85%
Norms and values	3.87%	0.87%	3.62%	1.58%	5.15%	2.09%
Nationalism	0.24%	1.60%	0.00%	4.73%	0.39%	3.76%
Corruption	3.69%	0.00%	1.16%	0.45%	3.58%	4.43%
Other	6.72%	1.90%	2.85%	1.58%	5.02%	4.93%

Tab. 3.1. Tweet topic by party (percentages). Reprinted from *Follow the closing of the campaign on streaming: The use of Twitter by Spanish political parties during the 2014 European elections* by M. Ramos Serrano, J.D. Fernández Gómez and A. Pineda, 2016, New Media & Society. Copyright 2016 by M. Ramos Serrano, J.D. Fernández Gómez and A. Pineda.

3.2 Research design

The review of the previous Twitter-based studies focusing on Spain has given us precious insights into the current state of the Spanish Twittersphere. Nevertheless, as outlined in the introduction to this chapter and remarked on throughout the literature review, few studies until now have attempted to investigate the degree of politicization of EU-related issues on Twitter – in Spain as

well as in other European countries. The aim of our research design is namely to fill this a gap in the literature, firstly providing empirical findings on the degree and dynamics of online EU politicization in the Twitter debates during the 2015 and 2016 Spanish general elections, and secondly proposing a model for the investigation of online EU politicization that is likely to be applicable to any other election. Relying on the theoretical framework outlined in the first chapter, in this section we contextualize and present our research questions and hypotheses, our methodology and the overall research design. The findings are discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

3.2.1. Research questions and hypotheses

In Chapter 1, we have proposed our operationalization of the concept of politicization as based on the three dimensions of salience, contentiousness and expansion to the public. In empirical terms, the three dimensions have been tackled as follows:

- *Salience*: the share of tweets dealing with European integration out of the total number of tweets sent during the election campaign;
- *Contentiousness*: the proportion of tweets that are critical towards the EU versus the proportion of tweets that are not critical (either neutral or positive). The closer the shares, the higher the contentiousness;
- *Expansion to the public*: the salience and contentiousness of EU-related issues amongst not only the tweets sent by the Spanish political elite, but also those sent from the general public.

Our guiding research question is thus:

RQ1: To what extent have EU-related issues been politicized in the online electoral campaign for the 2015 and 2016 Spanish general elections?

Considering the socio-political characteristics of the Spanish context at the time of the two elections – with Spain having received special EU financial assistance in 2012 in order to recapitalize its banks, the steep decline in the view that EU membership is a good thing since the onset of the economic crisis, and the recent electoral successes of Podemos (see Chapter 2 for an extensive discussion of these issues) - we consider Spain as a likely case in which EU politicization may occur. Our hypotheses, as a consequence, are:

- H1.a. We expect EU-related issues to be *salient* amongst both the tweets sent by the Spanish political elite and the general public;
- H1.b. We expect EU-related issues to be *contentious* amongst both the tweets sent by the Spanish political elite and the general public.

As a second step, we are interested in discovering:

RQ2.1: Which were the issues most often associated with criticism towards European integration in the 2015 and 2016 electoral campaigns?

In particular, in the light of the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 1, we wonder:

RQ2.2: To what extent are the critical issues emerging in the online debate ascribable to the four outlined lines of conflict?

Considering the specificity of the Spanish context as presented in Chapter 2:

- H2.a. We expect the 1st (*market-making vs. market correcting*), 2nd (*integration-autonomy*) and 4th (*core-periphery*) lines of conflict to play a significant role in structuring political contestation with the EU;
- H2.b. We expect the 3rd line of conflict (*free movement-national closure*) to play no significant role in structuring political contestation.

Moving thus to political competition, in Chapter 1 we outlined how European integration has for a long time been considered as a ‘sleeping giant’ that had the potential, if awakened, to impel voters to political behavior that would undercut the bases for contemporary party mobilization in many, if not most, European polities (Van der Eijk & Franklin, 2004). Findings attempting to investigate the existence of specific patterns of party competition and, in particular, the relationship between contestation over European integration and the traditional left-right cleavage suggest the existence of an inverted-U curve describing pro-integration centrist parties and anti-integration peripheral parties (see Hooghe & Marks, 1999; Hooghe, Marks & Wilson, 2004 amongst many others). According to this view, parties at the extreme left and extreme right of the political spectrum tend to be more critical towards the EU, while parties in the middle, including most social democratic, Christian democratic, liberal, and conservative parties, are generally much more supportive of European integration.

Two reasons have been identified in order to explain the tendency of parties located at the left and right extremes to criticize the EU, namely: ideology and competition incentives. According to the ideological explanation, opposition to European integration is deeply entrenched among the radical left as the European Union is fundamentally inhospitable to radical left policy goals, being primarily a market-liberal project mitigated by some measure of regulated capitalism. On the other hand, radical right parties by definition react against a series of perceived threats to the national community, such as foreign cultural influences, cosmopolitan elites, international agencies, which the European Union provides. At the same time, if we look at the structure of incentives, parties at the extremes

of the political spectrum are usually ‘unsuccessful parties’ i.e., parties with weak electoral support or that are locked out of government, and that thus have an interest in restructuring contestation. Considering that parties deliberately choose to emphasise those issues that are favourable to them and de-emphasise unfavourable ones (Budge and Farlie, 1983; Petrocik, 1996 amongst many others), we ask ourselves:

RQ3. Do parties differ in the extent to which they politicize the EU in their online electoral campaigns?

In this regard:

- H3.a. We expect candidates of parties with extreme ideological stances (Unidad Popular⁴⁵, Podemos⁴⁶) to make more use of tweets associated with the EU dimension of political competition;
- H3.b. We expect candidates of parties with extreme ideological stances (Unidad Popular, Podemos) to make more use of tweets that criticize the EU.

Although parties’ attitudes towards European integration as a whole are best described by the inverted-U curve, with regard to moderate parties we have seen in Chapter 1 how the effect of left-right position becomes quite strong and highly significant when one examines policies aimed at achieving European regulated capitalism (see Hall & Soskice, 2001; Hooghe & Marks, 1999; Pollack, 1999 amongst others). On the one hand, the center-left supports political integration in order to create European regulated capitalism with the capacity to regulate markets, redistribute resources, and sustain partnership among public and private actors. Social democratic parties have therefore become distinctly

⁴⁵ Unidad Popular” is the name of the electoral coalition lead by Izquierda Unida at the time of the 2015 Spanish general elections.

⁴⁶ “Unidos Podemos” in the 2016 Spanish general elections

more pro-integration as regulated capitalism has come on the European agenda. However, the left-right dimension also structures the positions of center-right parties to European integration. They support market integration which means that they support European integration in general terms, but they oppose policies, particularly concerning the environment, cohesion, or employment, that regulate capitalism. Considering that we expect the market-making vs. market-correcting line of conflict to play a significant role in structuring online contestation vs. the EU (H2.a),

- H3.c. We expect EU-related issues to be more salient amongst the tweets sent by candidates of left-wing moderate parties (PSOE) than in those sent by candidates of right-wing moderate parties (PP, Ciudadanos)
- H3.d. We expect candidates of left-wing moderate parties (PSOE) to make more use of tweets that criticize the EU than candidates from right-wing moderate parties (PP, Ciudadanos)

3.2.2. Methodology: data collection, method(s) and research design

Data collection

Electoral campaigns in Spain officially start two weeks before the election day. In order to answer our research questions, our data collection includes:

- *2015 Spanish elections*: tweets from 4 December to 20 December (election day)
- *2016 Spanish elections*: tweets from 10 June to 26 June (election day)

As outlined in Chapter 2, for the purpose of this study we have included in our analysis five Spanish political parties: the four main political parties - the

traditional centre-left (PSOE) and centre-right (PP) parties, and the new parties Podemos and Ciudadanos - and finally the extreme-left coalition Unidad Popular which, albeit a minor force in terms of vote shares, is relevant for testing our hypotheses. During the timeframes outlined above, we have therefore collected:

- *All tweets sent from the twitter accounts of the Spanish political elite.* For the purpose of this study we have adopted a rather broad definition of political elite, including in the data collection:
 - a) the *national accounts* of the five analysed Spanish political parties (@PSOE, @PPopular, @ahorapodemos, @CiudadanosCs, @UnidadPopular_);
 - b) those of their *political leaders* (@sanchezcastejon, @marianorajoy, @Pablo_Iglesias, @Albert_Rivera, @agarzon) and of the main figures holding political offices in the *party's secretariat*;
 - c) those of all their *representatives* at the Spanish Congress, the Spanish Senate and the European Parliament; and finally
 - d) a large sample⁴⁷ of their *candidates* for the 2015 Spanish general elections.
- *All tweets sent from the general public to the listed accounts*, including replies and retweets.

Tweets have been retrieved through the software Method52 (see Method section below for extensive discussion on the software), which allowed us to collect data automatically by connecting directly to Twitter's application

⁴⁷ The official list of candidates has been retrieved from the Spanish *Boletín Oficial del Estado* (BOE). As a few thousand candidates were running, for the Congress we limited our analysis to the first 20% candidates for each (fixed) party's list, and to a 20% random sample of candidates for the Senate.

programming interface (API). In particular, for the purpose of this study we have connected to Twitter's Public Streaming API,⁴⁸ which allowed us to collect tweets in real time. Specifically, the 'Follow' parameter allows researchers to collect, in real time and for a list of selected Twitter accounts – in our case, those of the so-defined 'Spanish political elite' – a) tweets created by the user(s); b) tweets retweeted by the user(s); c) replies to any tweet created by the user(s); d) retweets of any tweet created by the user and e) manual replies, created without pressing a reply button (e.g. "@twitterapi I agree").⁴⁹⁵⁰

In analytical terms, our type of data collection – retrieving tweets on the basis of a selected list of accounts/authors, instead than on the basis of a list of keywords – has several advantages. On the one hand, as we are primarily interested in the online activity carried on by the political elite, an actor-based collection was the only option in order to retrieve all tweets sent by our list of political accounts. On the other hand, with regards to citizens it is true that through an actor-based collection we do not retrieve the complete amount of EU-related tweets sent by Spanish citizens at the time of the elections, as we are 'missing' tweets which are not sent in interaction with the political elite. However, our procedure allows for a measurement of the relative salience of EU-related tweets out of the total amount of tweets sent, which could not be obtained through a keyword-based collection (i.e., if we collected all tweets containing the word 'Europe', we do not have a way of measuring the percentage of the overall sample of tweets sent in a defined period they represent, as we do not have the total number of tweets sent in Spain in the same period).⁵¹ The same collection

⁴⁸ See <https://dev.twitter.com/streaming/public> for technical information on the Twitter's Public Stream API.

⁴⁹ More information about the 'Follow' parameter can be retrieved here: <https://dev.twitter.com/streaming/overview/request-parameters#follow>

⁵⁰ On the other hand, the 'Follow' stream does not retrieve: a) tweets mentioning the user (e.g. "Hello @twitterapi!"); b) manual retweets created without pressing a retweet button (e.g. "RT @twitterapi The API is great") and c) tweets by protected users.

⁵¹ Nevertheless, in another study we run a similar analysis on a different data collection based on keywords related to the two Spanish elections (#20D and #26J respectively). Further information can be retrieved at the following link: <http://www.euvisions.eu/eu-related-discussions-in-the-spanish-elections-a-twitter-study>. Results proved to be in line with those presented in this work, thus confirming the validity of our collection criterion.

criterion has also been adopted by the *Social Media Study 2014*, carried out by the European Election Study (2014) in their first attempt to include social media data in their Elections' databases.⁵²

For the purpose of this study, analyses have been finally limited to tweets in Spanish, which constitute more than 90% of the collected dataset. Descriptive statistics are provided in Table 3.2.

Category	Total number of tweets		N unique active users	
	December 2015	June 2016 ⁵³	December 2015	June 2016
From all parties	129,705	114,748	458	498
Partido Popular	32,257	37,317	126	162
PSOE	25,963	27,174	131	136
Ciudadanos	16,923	22,042	74	83
Podemos	21,952	28,215	69	117
Unidad Popular	32,610		58	
From citizens	2,678,895	1,846,843	288,852	211,216

Tab.3.2. Number of tweets collected by user category

Methods(s)

Semi-supervised machine learning

⁵² European Election Study (2014). *2014 Social Media Study*. Available at: <http://europeanelectionstudies.net/european-election-studies/ees-2014-study/social-media-study-2014>

⁵³From 11 June 2016 at 13:58 until 14 June 2016 at 10.40 we faced a technical problem with the functioning of our server, which resulted in a temporary interruption of our collection. Fortunately, through the use of Twitter User_Timeline (information available at: https://dev.twitter.com/rest/reference/get/statuses/user_timeline) and that of a similar backup collection we had set up at the beginning of June we have been able to retrieve the majority of our data, thus significantly reducing the data loss' impact. Thank to these operations, we retrieved in fact: a) all tweets and retweets from the Spanish political elite and b) all replies sent by citizens. The only type of data we have not unfortunately been able to retrieve are citizens' retweets of tweets sent by the political elite. Nevertheless, considering that the focus of our work is primarily on the saliency, contentiousness and expansion of EU-related issues and that the data loss affected indifferently any type of tweet, we are convinced that the validity of our results is not questioned by the loss of two days of citizens' retweets.

Analyses were conducted employing a semi-supervised machine learning approach based on the Natural Language Processing (NLP) software Method52.⁵⁴ To place our approach within the existing literature on social media analysis, we can broadly distinguish between three main streams of work (Wibberley et al., 2013): approaches that employ automatic data analysis without tailoring the analysis to the specifics of the situation (Tumasjan et al., 2011; O'Connor et al., 2010; Gonzalez-Bailon et al., 2010); approaches that employ manual analysis of the data by researchers with a tailored analytical approach (Bermingham & Smeaton, 2011; Castillo et al., 2011) and approaches that employ tailored automatic data analysis, using a supervised machine-learning approach (Carvalho et al., 2011; Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2012; Hopkins & King, 2010). While the first stream of research has been criticised for applying out-of-domain techniques in a 'black box' fashion, and for the sensitivity of its results to the chosen parameters (Gayo-Avello, 2012; Jungherr et al., 2012), the second approach suffers from being restricted to fairly small datasets, as it relies on manual annotation only. On the other hand, supervised and semi-supervised approaches such as the one adopted in this work overcome these limits by combining a training phase based on human annotation with subsequent automated classification.

A long established sub-field of artificial intelligence research, NLP combines approaches developed in the fields of computer science, applied mathematics and linguistics, and in recent years has been increasingly used for automated social media analysis, as it allows algorithms to be trained to split and categorise Tweets on the basis of the text they contain. In particular, Method52 uses active learning, coupled with a Naive Bayes model, to allow social scientists to construct bespoke *classifiers*, i.e. algorithms trained to place tweets automatically in one of a number of categories of meaning pre-defined by the analyst.

⁵⁴ Method52 is a web-hosted software platform, developed by technologists at the University of Sussex and CASM Consulting LLP. For more information see: <http://www.taglaboratory.org/>

To perform each of the analyses presented in this article, an *ad hoc* classifier has been built in three steps:

- I) *Creation of a gold-standard baseline.* We have manually annotated a set of 150 to 300 tweets (gold-standard baseline), coding them according to the chosen categories. This phase has a crucial function as it provides a baseline of truth against which the classifier performance can be tested;
- II) *Training.* We have manually annotated a set of tweets as belonging to one of the coding categories chosen in the first phase. The set of tweets to be annotated was dynamically proposed by the software, which selected for training those tweets the classification of which it was most uncertain about. The number of tweets manually annotated in this phase depended on the performance of the classifier and ranged between 500 and 1000. Based on our inputs, the NLP algorithm looked for statistical correlations between the language used and the meaning expressed to arrive at a series of rules-based criteria;
- III) *Classifying.* Having learned these associations, the computer applied the same criteria to additional (and unseen) tweets and categorised them along the same, inferred, lines as the examples it had been given.

Finally, in order to validate the quality of the built algorithms, we tested the performance of all the classifiers used in the project by comparing the decisions they made against the human-coded gold-standard baseline created in phase I. The performance of each classifier was assessed by comparing the decisions that the algorithm made in classifying the gold-standard baseline against the decisions we made while coding it in Phase I. This test has four outcomes we can rely on in assessing the reliability of our results:

- *Accuracy*. The percentage likelihood of any randomly selected Tweet within the dataset being placed into the appropriate category by the algorithm;
- *Recall*. The number of correct selections that the classifier makes as a proportion of the total correct selections it could have made. E.g. if there were ten relevant tweets in a data set, and a relevancy classifier successfully picks eight of them, it has a recall score of 80%;
- *Precision*: The number of correct selections the classifier makes as a proportion of all the selections it has made. E.g. if a relevancy classifier selects ten tweets as relevant, and eight of them actually are indeed relevant, it has a precision score of 80%;
- *F-score*: The harmonic mean of precision and recall.

Co-occurrence networks

Although most of our analyses are based on semi-supervised machine learning, in our last step we have graphically recreated a co-occurrence network of words in order to identify the EU-related issues most often associated with criticism towards European integration. Successfully used as an analysis technique since the early stages of content analysis (Osgood, 1959), word-to-word co-occurrence networks allow us to easily identify words with similar appearance patterns (connected by edges) and to further interpret the emerged co-occurrence structure. For the visualization of co-occurrence networks only we have employed the software KH coder, which computes word location based on the method developed by Fruchterman and Reingold (1991).

Network analysis

Network analysis is now a widely popular approach in the field of online research, and in particular in the study of Twitter (see Bruns & Burgess 2012; Calvo et al., 2016). Due to the “natively” networked character of Twitter, in fact, mapping online conversation networks can provide important insights into a public discussion over a societal or political issue - in our case European integration - allowing researchers to investigate the structure of the online debate (polarized vs. homophile) and to identify the various “clusters” of highly interconnected users participating in the discussion. Furthermore, as retweets can be considered as consistent indicators of support for a tweeter’s account and content (Conover et al. 2011a; Conover et al. 2011b), scholars have demonstrated that retweet networks can give us important information about the political partisanship of users in a debate. Communities emerging from a retweet network can in fact be considered as “partisan communities” of users associated by their shared support for something (such as an actor or an issue).

In our work, we use network analysis for two goals. First of all, by applying this technique we can descriptively analyse the interactional structure of those citizens who criticize the current state of European integration (“critical citizens”), in order to see whether or not they result in the formation of relatively disconnected conversational communities. Second, in case critical citizens turn out to be clustered into disconnected communities, we can “characterize” each community on the basis of its “influencers” (in a retweet network, the users who have been retweeted the most). In case influencers correspond to recognizable parties or politicians, we could thus treat communities as partisan communities formed by citizens that support the same party. Albeit descriptive, this operation would ultimately allow us to detect the political partisanship of critical citizens.

Research design

Identifying political issues

As a first step, we created a succession of classifiers in order to identify political issues. In order to improve the performance of our classification, we ran a first classifier broadly distinguishing between political and non-political content (i.e. tweets that have nothing to do with politics, such as ‘personal’ tweets), as the latter were not relevant for our purpose. Secondly, we further analysed the tweets containing political content in order to identify proper (political) ‘issues’ from political tweets related to campaign mobilization and logistics, such as tweets referring to political campaign broadcasting, to political campaign mobilization or endorsing (or countering) specific political parties or individuals.⁵⁵

Identifying EU-related issues

As a second step, we tried to create a new classifier to pull out EU-related tweets from our set of (political) issue-related tweets. Yet, EU-related tweets were too few to appear in our randomly selected gold-standard baseline, thus preventing us from building a classifier to distinguish between EU-related issues and other political issues. For this reason we decided to combine the use of dictionaries – in order to identify all tweets containing a term from a selected list of EU-related keywords – with the further use of machine learning, by building a relevancy classifier in order to distinguish between tweets that were actually related to the EU from those that were not. In order for our dictionary of EU-related keywords to be as comprehensive as possible, we first created a minimal list of terms directly related to the EU and its institutions. As a second step, we downloaded all original tweets containing the selected words and calculated the associated co-occurrence frequency counts in order to see with which words our initial terms were most frequently associated (Frequency > 5). We then excluded stop words, terms not primarily used in relation to the EU (e.g. ‘corruption’) and generic terms (e.g. *euros*, the plural for *euro*). Finally, we read through all tweets

⁵⁵ The content categories are elaborated from Patterson, T. E. (1993). *Out of order: How the decline of the political parties and the growing power of the news media undermine the American way of electing presidents*. New York: Alfred Knopf.

matching each of the ‘candidate’ keywords in order to see if they could contribute to the identification EU-related issues, and thus added the selected keywords to our initial list.

Table 3.3 presents the final list of included keywords. As we can see from the table, the same operation of keywords selection was separately repeated for the 2015 and 2016 Spanish general elections, thus allowing us to adapt our keyword list to the context-specific features of Twitter conversations at the time of each data collection (e.g. Brexit-related conversations were absent at the time of the 2015 elections, while they constitute the majority of EU-related tweets during the 2016 elections).

List	Keywords
<i>Initial list</i>	Europa, Europea, Europeo, Juncker, Schulz, PE, UE, Euro, Bruselas, Schengen, Austeridad, Merkel, Troika
<i>December 2015</i>	Europa, Europea, Europeo, Juncker, PE, UE, Euro, Bruselas, Schengen, Austeridad, Merkel, Troika, Europeos, europanaranja, Grecia, refugiados, TTIP, Alemania
<i>June 2016</i>	austeridad, brexit, brussels, euref, euro, europa, europe, europea, europeas, europeístas, europeo, europeos, europeus, grecia, juncker, merkel, pe, refugiados, Reino unido, troika, ttip, ue, uk, brexitm4, brexitornot, byebyeukep, elpaisbrexit, euref, ganabrexitarv

Tab. 3.3. Dictionaries of EU-related keywords

Hence we obtained our sub-sample of tweets containing at least one of the selected keywords. We then built an additional ‘relevancy’ classifier in order to scrape proper EU-related issues from the overall sample of tweets containing EU-related keywords. In building our relevancy classifier, we coded as ‘relevant’ all tweets referring, directly or indirectly, to: the European Union as a political subject; its institutions (EC, EP, ECB, ECJ and others); its policies; or the direct effect of EU belonging/policies on Spain or other member states. On the other hand, we have coded as ‘irrelevant’ all tweets referring to: Europe as a geographical community, i.e. as the sum of its member states; actions carried out by Spanish Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) not in their role as MEPs; job offers

at European institutions and other undoubtedly not relevant tweets. For the purpose of clarity, Figure 3.1 summarizes the overall process of the identification of EU-related tweets.

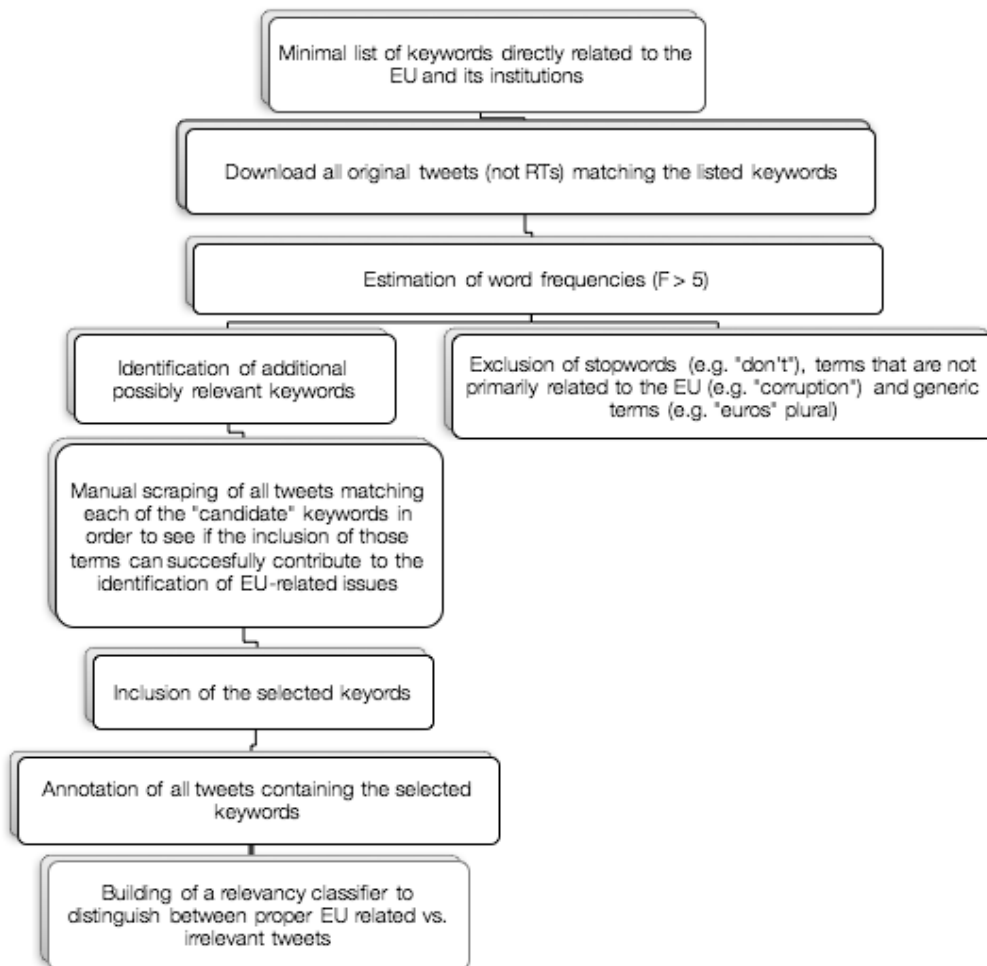


Fig. 3.1 Summary of the selection process for the identification of EU-related tweets.

Identifying critical tweets

As a third step, we created a sentiment classifier in order to identify critical tweets from our sample of EU-related tweets. In this regard, it is important to clarify that our definition of 'critical tweets' against the EU encompasses different forms of criticism. It includes both forms of the so-called 'hard euroscepticism' – whereby a principled opposition to the EU and European integration is manifested

and the opposition is such that the opponents either think that their countries should withdraw from membership or have policy preferences towards the EU that are tantamount to being opposed to the whole project of European integration as it is currently conceived (Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2002). It also includes both expressions of 'soft euroscepticism', where there is not a principled objection to European integration or EU membership but rather an opposition to the Union's current or future planned trajectory (Szczerbiak & Taggart, 2008a) and/or where concerns about one or more policy area have led to the expression of qualified opposition to the EU (Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2002).

Identifying critical actors and critical issues.

Once our sub-sample of critical tweets had been identified, we had all the information to assess the extent of EU politicization. Together with this, starting from the identified critical tweets we could move forward with our analyses in order to investigate the other two nuclei of questions we are interested in: namely, the relationship between left-right positioning and EU politicization and the identification of the most relevant critical issues. With regard to the former, together with estimating the differences in the levels of salience and criticism accorded to EU-related issues by different parties, as in the previous step we coded all tweets sent by the public as critical or not vis-à-vis the current state of European integration. We used this new variable to investigate the political partisanship not only of critical leaders, but also of critical citizens. Differently from the previous steps, this latter task was pursued through the use of network analysis, a technique that allowed us to explore the online interactional structure of critical citizens and to identify the partisan communities around which they are clustered.

On the other hand, once the extent to which EU-related issues are politicized was assessed, and the political and societal actors that are more critical towards the EU identified, we could not conclude this work without providing an understanding of the critical issues in reason of which the EU is criticized. To

complete this last task, in the case of Spanish candidates and representatives, frequencies of EU-related tweets were such as to allow for manual qualitative content analysis, while with regard to Spanish citizens we have recreated a co-occurrence network of words in order to identify the EU-related issues most often associated with criticism towards European integration.

For the purpose of clarity, the overall analyses' structure is summarized in Fig. 3.1

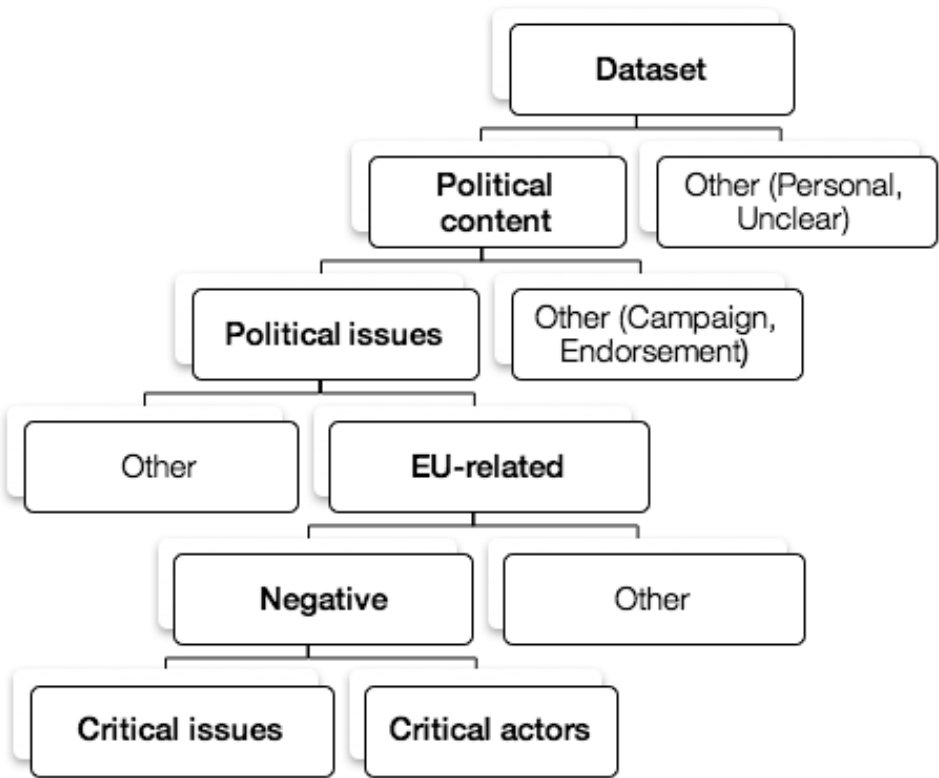


Fig. 3.2 Analyses' structure.

In the first section of this work we have extensively presented the theoretical and methodological background on which our research is grounded. In Chapter 1, we introduced our theoretical framework for interpreting and understanding the crisis currently faced by the European Union, with a specific focus on the four lines of conflict that have emerged with the exacerbation of existing tensions between the NBWS and economic integration. In Chapter 2 we

focused on the specificity of the Spanish context, introducing the main political parties and the Spanish political system, referring to several sources to describe the attitudes of Spanish elites and citizens about the EU and European integration, and contextualizing the 2015 and 2016 general elections in the broader socio-political context. Finally, in Chapter 3 we have discussed the potential of social media data for political research, proposing Twitter as a particularly insightful platform, retracing the main approaches to the use of Internet-based data to study elections – in general, and with a specific focus on Spain – and presenting the method(s) employed for this current research.

In the second part of this work we now present the findings of our research. In Chapter 4 we discuss our results with regard to the Spanish political elite, analysing the extent to which EU-related issues have actually been politicized by Spanish parties and candidates during the two electoral campaigns, presenting qualitative insights on the type of opposition to the EU carried out by Spanish politicians and discussing the relationship between criticism of the EU and parties' positioning on the left-right political spectrum. Finally, in Chapter 5 we focus on citizens' reactions, discussing also in this case the extent of EU politicization, identifying the most critical issues and using the network structure of opposition to the EU to interpret citizens' clustering around specific political and societal groups.

CHAPTER IV. Politicizing Europe: Insights from the Spanish Political Elite

The 2015 general elections, held on 20 December 2015, may be regarded as “one of the major political events to have occurred in recent Spanish political history” (Medina & Correa 2016, p.1). For the first time in the history of Spain’s current democracy, voters could choose between four major political choices, thus marking the end to the two-party system that had characterized the country for the previous three decades. The elections generated a fragmented parliament with no clear majority, and after five months of unsuccessful negotiations to form a government, new general elections were called for 26 June 2016. Before introducing the results of our analyses, in the next paragraph we briefly outline the context in which the 2015 general elections were held, the failure of the negotiations to form the new government and the situation at the time of the 2016 Spanish general elections. We then present our findings with regard to the Spanish political elite, with a view to understanding to what extent Spanish political parties have politicized European integration in these last two elections (section 4.2), using Twitter data to test the inverted-U curve hypothesis⁵⁶ (section 4.3) and identifying the key EU-related issues into debate. To answer our research questions, in Chapter 5 we present the parallel findings with regard to the Spanish public(s). Finally, our Conclusion is dedicated to the discussion of our results, to their implications and to the open questions that future research might address.

4.1. Institutional fatigue, public indignation and a four party electoral scenario: the 2015 and 2016 electoral campaigns in context

⁵⁶ As outlined in Chapter 3, the reference to the shape of an inverted U-curve might be misleading in the Spanish context, as no party in Spain is located on the extreme-right of the political spectrum.

The 2015 general elections generated a truly unprecedented amount of attention and interest among both the media and the general public (López García, 2016). As highlighted by Orriols and Cordero (2016), people who described themselves as being “very” or “fairly interested” in politics rose to 38.5%, the highest values in the CIS⁵⁷ series and about six points higher than the two previous general elections. The pervasive display of corruption scandals by the media – perpetrated mainly by public representatives of the two main parties – combined with the lack of solutions and a deteriorated welfare system, led part of the register to change its voting intention from abstention or voting for one of the two main parties to voting for new political offers (De La Poza, Jodar & Pricop, 2017).

4.1.1. The 2015 electoral campaign (4 December - 20 December 2015)

The 2015 electoral campaign officially started on 4 December 2015 and was followed with intense interest. Three factors contributed to increasing the importance of the 2015 election campaign: a climate of uncertainty around the election results, the “novelty” of the political offer – both Podemos and Ciudadanos where in fact standing in a general election for the first time – and finally the presence of three first-time candidates for Prime Minister: Pedro Sánchez (PSOE), Pablo Iglesias (Podemos) and Albert Rivera (Ciudadanos) (Orriols & Cordero 2016, p.10). Throughout the campaign, all the polls indicated that the PP was the front-runner, although it was not clear whether it would be able to form a government. On the other hand, the second and third positions were highly contested in the polls. The battle seemed initially to be between the PSOE and Ciudadanos, but during the election campaign Podemos started to rise in the polls – also thanks to the success of its electoral coalitions with other left-wing and regional parties in Catalonia, Galicia and Valencia (so-called ‘confluences’) – and in

57 The Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS) is an independent entity assigned to the Spanish Ministry of the Presidency. The main remit of the CIS is to contribute scientific knowledge on Spanish society. Information available at: http://www.cis.es/cis/opencms/EN/8_cis/

the days before the election was placed in third position, very close to PSOE (ibid.).

With regard to the electoral campaign, as reconstructed by Medina and Correa (2016, p. 4), the issues stressed most in the 2015 parties' electoral manifestos were the improvement of the welfare state, the best way to achieve economic recovery, the need to accomplish various institutions reforms (especially to the electoral, judicial and regional funding systems) and the need for (or limits to) a constitutional reform. Nevertheless, the main focus of each party's campaign strategy was on disparaging the attributes of their opponents (ibid., p. 5) more than on the programmatic issues presented in their electoral manifestos, a notable exception being Izquierda Unida (IU).⁵⁸ The incumbent party (PP), which was presenting itself as the only serious and reliable party to rule Spain in difficult times, initially addressed all its criticisms against the PSOE - possibly with the goal of leading the competition back to a two-party logic - but since the second week it intensified its attacks on Ciudadanos, trying to avoid the loss of votes from liberal sectors (ibid.). At the same time, the socialist PSOE insisted on the idea that they represented the only realistic alternative to the PP, pointing to the lack of political experience of Podemos and to the ideological closeness between Ciudadanos and the PP (ibid., p. 6). With regard to the new parties, Ciudadanos targeted the PP by highlighting corruption scandals and pointing to the inefficiency of the austerity policies implemented by Mariano Rajoy, and accused the PSOE of being a catalyst of the collapse of Spanish politics (ibid., p. 5). Podemos classified both PP and PSOE as intrinsic elements of the so-called "old politics", which had brought Spain nothing but corruption and poverty (ibid., p. 7). Finally, IU was placed in a particularly tricky dilemma, as any attack to Podemos would have ultimately been an attack to its own political project.

⁵⁸ As highlighted by Medina and Correa (2016, p. 8), "the media soon realized that Podemos was better equipped than IU when it comes to connecting with traditional voters of the radical left and beyond. The result was that Podemos occupied the political niche formerly reserved for the IU candidate, thus IU did not take part in any of the most relevant debates. This placed IU in a tricky dilemma insofar as IU acknowledged that any attempt to undermine Podemos was, in essence, an attack to its very own political project. The IU strategy remained at an ideological level by focusing on the need to implement welfare politics, hence IU identified the PP as its main rival".

The results of the 2015 general elections and the failure of negotiations

The transition from three decades of a two-party system to a multi-party one was confirmed by the election's results: PP and PSOE together accounted for 50.73% of the total vote (28.7% and 22% respectively), 23% less votes than in 2011, corresponding to a loss of about five million voters (Antenas 2016a, p. 16).

Party	Popular vote	Popular vote (+/-)	Congress seats
PP	28.71%	-16,33	35.14%
PSOE	22.00%	-6,67	25.71%
Podemos	20.68%	<i>New</i>	19.71%
Ciudadanos	13.94%	<i>New</i>	11.43%
IU–UPeC	3.67%	-1,81	2.57%
ERC–CatSí	2.40%	+1,34	2.29%
DiL	2.25%	-1,92	1.71%
EAJ/PNV	1.20%	-0,13	0.57%
EH Bildu	0.87%	-0,50	0.57%
CC–PNC	0.32%	-0,27	0.29%
Others	3.21%	N.D.	/
Blank ballots	0.75%	N.D.	/

Tab. 4.1. Results of the 2015 Spanish general elections – Spanish Congress

As highlighted by Antenas, “bipartisanship was not definitely over, but *turnismo* [turn-taking] between PP and PSOE [...] had ended. Their electoral base shrank, making it impossible to continue the traditional system of governance in which one of the two was the cornerstone of the government, while the other sat comfortably in the opposition awaiting its turn in the forthcoming legislature” (ibid.). Despite confirming itself as the first Spanish party, the PP did not obtain the absolute majority in the lower legislative Chamber (*Congreso de los Diputados*), opening up a difficult negotiation process which ended with the call of a new election for 26 June.

As mentioned, the beneficiaries of the two-party system collapse were not traditional state-wide minor parties, but the newcomers Ciudadanos and, first and foremost, Podemos, which together with its electoral coalitions – the Catalan “En

Comu Podem”, the Galician “En Marea” and a bilateral alliance in Pais Valencià with the Catalan nationalist and green party Compromís – received 20.6% of the vote, only 1.5% short of PSOE. On the other hand, the ballots revealed the relative weakness of Ciudadanos (13.93%), which failed expectations having exposed its organizational limits in the campaign. The party appeared in fact largely as “a television project with little militant capacity and weak roots in society”, as shown by its difficulty in finding reliable and qualified candidates in several constituencies (ibid., p. 17).

Summing up, the 2015 Spanish general elections produced at least four main changes in the Spanish political context (Medina & Correa, 2016): the emergence of multiparty trends; the increase of fragmentation; the declining leadership of the left by the PSOE in favour of Podemos and, last but not least, the significant loss of votes for the PP, which deeply affected its capability of conducting successful negotiations to form a coalition government. Ultimately, the 2015 general elections generated a fragmented parliament without a clear majority. As neither the sum of the seats of the parties on the centre and centre-right (Ciudadanos and PP) nor the sum of the seats of the centre-left and left-wing parties (PSOE, Podemos, and IU) were enough to form a parliamentary majority, King Felipe VI appointed PSOE’s leader Pedro Sánchez to form a government. Nevertheless, this attempt also failed, requiring an unlikely coalition between Ciudadanos and Podemos. The shortest legislature in recent Spanish democratic history thus ended with the announcement of new general elections for 26 June 2016, after five months of unsuccessful negotiations to form a government (Orriols & Cordero, 2016).

4.1.2. The 2016 electoral campaign (10 June – 26 June 2016)

Starting on 10 June, the campaign for the 2016 general elections was held in a very different context from December 2015. First, Podemos and Izquierda Unida ran this time under the coalition Unidos Podemos, with the aim of overtaking PSOE and trying to catch up with PP. Their agreement – incorporating

50 measures focused on economic, social, institutional, environmental and international issues and a total of 11 different parties - had potential benefits for both Podemos and Izquierda Unida, allowing IU a more efficient translation of votes into seats and Podemos further growth (Simón 2017, p. 14). In this way, Unidos Podemos placed itself as the second party according to opinion polls and remained in that position for the whole electoral campaign, in contrast with 2015. Second, the 2016 elections were contested in the anomalous context of repeating an election after a process of failed negotiations, softening the effect of retrospective voting (i.e. the idea of a vote based on the past performance of the incumbent), and allowing voters to easily anticipate the government formation that each party would favour and to take such information into account at the ballot box (ibid.). Third, the campaign for a new election was held in a context of additional pressure from the European Union. By the end of 2015 Spain had a deficit of 5.1% of its GDP, 4.2% more than the target agreed by the EC, and was risking a fine of about 2,200 million euro for its deviation from the Stability Pact (Simón 2017, p. 15; see also Pérez, 2016a). Although the Commission announced that sanctions against Spain (and Portugal) would be postponed until after the elections, in a letter to the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, Mariano Rajoy assured that Spain would take additional measures to address the deficit as soon as a new government was in place. This letter was highly criticized by the opposition as it implied very restricted margins of manoeuvre with the Commission for the new government, whatever its composition (Pérez, 2016b). Last but not least, the victory of the “Leave” front in the UK referendum on the European Union membership on 23 June dominated the last days’ discussions, with Rajoy making an official statement and insisting on “the importance of political and economic stability” just two days before the elections (González, 2016).

The outcome of the 2016 general elections

The 2016 general elections resulted in a strengthening of the PP, which

obtained 7,906,185 votes (33.03%) and 137 seats, benefiting from a strong mobilization of the conservative vote as a reaction to the rise of Unidos Podemos and from the concentration of the right-wing vote around it to the detriment of Ciudadanos (Antenas 2016a, p. 18). Turnout fell by 3.2 points in comparison with the December elections, penalizing mainly the new parties, whereas the two mainstream parties' total share of votes showed a slight recovery, going from 50% in 2015 to 55% in 2016.

Party	Popular vote	Popular vote (+/-)	Congress seats
PP	33.01%	+4.30	39.14%
PSOE	22.63%	+0.63	24.29%
Unidos Podemos	21.15%	-3.34	20.29%
Ciudadanos	13.06%	-0.88	9.14%
ERC-CatSí	2.66%	+0.26	2.57%
CDC	2.01%	-0.24	2.29%
EAJ/PNV	1.19%	-0.01	1.43%
PACMA	1.19%	+0.32	/
EH Bildu	0.77%	-0.10	0.57%
CC-PNC	0.33%	+0.01	0.29%
Others	1.26%	N.D.	/
Blank ballots	0.74%	N.D.	/

Tab. 4.2. Results of the 2016 Spanish general elections – Spanish Congress

Contrary to the polls' predictions, Unidos Podemos did not manage to overtake PSOE, obtaining 21.1% of the votes against the 22.6% for the latter and overall losing around one million votes in comparison to what Podemos and IU had obtained separately on 20 December (ibid.). Antenas (2016a) has identified three reasons that might have concurred in undermining the success of Unidos Podemos. First, from December to June Podemos "issued too many contradictory messages, which created confusion both on the 'left' and 'right' flank of its voters and helped to undermine its credibility" (ibid., p. 18): it moved from rejecting any collaboration to setting up a coalition with Izquierda Unida, from campaigning

against PSOE to proposing to it the formation of a joint government and, last but not least, Iglesias suddenly embraced “social democracy” in contrast with his previous strategy of “going beyond left and right”. Second, Unidos Podemos “had a very light campaign [...], designed more not to frighten moderate voters than to mobilise its own social base”, thus demobilizing its supporters without gaining votes from other ranks. Third, the abstention of a number of 2015 voters reflected “the limits of the politicisation process brought about by the cycle initiated by the 15M movement”, as well as “the instability of Unidos Podemos’ electoral base, part of which could easily fall into apathy” (ibid.).

As its results show, the new election did not solve the problem of forming a new government, as neither the forces advocating for political and social change nor the forces of preservation were able to prevail, thus leading to a situation of unstable equilibrium (Antenas, 2016b, p. 21). After a few months of complex and unsuccessful negotiations,⁵⁹ at the end of October Mariano Rajoy was appointed candidate again by the King. Defeated in the first round on 27 October, PP’s leader was elected two days later with the support of PP, Ciudadanos and CC (170 seats) and the abstention of the parliamentary group of the PSOE (68 seats) – a decision made after an internal struggle in the party that ended with the resignation of PSOE’s leader Pedro Sánchez⁶⁰ – except for 15 PSOE MPs who decided not to follow party discipline (El País, 2016). The 26 June 2016 elections thus ended the first phase of the political crisis that had begun in 2011, but not the political crisis itself.

⁵⁹ See Simón 2017 for a full report on the 2016 negotiation process.

⁶⁰ As reported by Simón (2017, p. 21), “After the 25 September regional elections in Galicia and the Basque Country, Pedro Sánchez announced that he would not agree to abstain in the investiture vote and that the PSOE would hold a congress and primaries to elect a national candidate days before the deadline for new elections, 31 October. During the following week, a dispute broke out in the party; 17 members of the party executive committee resigned in order to force Pedro Sánchez’s withdrawal. He resisted, and on 1 October, in a Federal Committee, the factions fought it out while calling into question each other’s legitimacy. Finally, Sánchez was defeated on his proposal for a party congress (132 against and 107 in favour) and he handed in his resignation (Díez 2016). After those events, the PSOE was led by a caretaker committee that had a majority of members critical of Sánchez. On 23 October the PSOE, in a new Federal Committee, decided that it would abstain unconditionally to avoid a third general election.

4.2. Politicizing Europe? Saliency and contentiousness of EU-related issues amongst the Spanish political elite

Our definition of politicization, extensively discussed in Chapter 1 and operationalized in Chapter 3, is based on the three dimensions of *saliency*, *contentiousness* and *expansion to the public*, where the third dimension is measured by assessing the saliency and contentiousness of EU-related issues amongst not only the tweets from the Spanish political elite, but also those sent by the public(s). As highlighted by Kriesi and Grande (2014), the saliency of EU-related issues amongst the public represents in fact a necessary condition for politicization to occur. To fully answer our guiding research question:

RQ1: To what extent have EU-related issues been politicized in the online electoral campaign for the 2015 and 2016 Spanish general elections?

we thus need to wait until the next chapter, where citizens' results are presented. On the contrary, in this section we test the first part of our expectations with regard to both the dimension of saliency ("H1.a. We expect EU-related issues to be **salient** amongst the tweets sent by the Spanish political elite *and the general public*") and contentiousness ("H1.b. We expect EU-related issues to be **contentious** amongst both the tweets sent by the Spanish political elite *and the general public*"), as they emerge from our 2015 and 2016 results.

4.2.1. Saliency

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the saliency of EU-related issues is here measured as the share of tweets dealing with European integration out of the total number of tweets sent during the election campaign, aggregated by party. The identification of EU-related tweets has been accomplished identifying first all tweets including a selected list of EU-related terms, and then classifying all tweets matching at least one of the keywords present in our dictionary through an *ad hoc*

built NLP algorithm (“relevancy classifier”) trained to distinguish EU-related issues from the overall sample of tweets containing EU-related keywords. As reported in the methodological section in Chapter 3 (section 3.2.2), for the purpose of this analysis we have coded as:

Relevant tweets: tweets referring, directly or indirectly, to the European Union as a political subject; to its institutions (EC, EP, ECB, ECJ and others); to its policies; or to the direct effect of EU membership/policies on Spain or other member states.

Irrelevant tweets: tweets referring to Europe as a geographical community (i.e. as the sum of its member states); to actions carried out by Spanish Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) not in their role as MEPs; to job offers at European institutions and other undoubtedly not relevant tweets.

Examples of relevant and irrelevant tweets are quoted below.

Relevant tweets:

"Con la austeridad se está contruyendo Europa a 2 velocidades: la de bienestar y la de la periferia pobre" @TaniaGonzalezPs #ContigoEnAvilés

"Desde la entrada de ESP en la UE se elimina industria para no competir con Francia o Alemania. Ahora lo pagamos" @agarzon #JóvenesConGarzón

"La UE y sus multinacionales son las sanguijuelas del mundo" lee la entrevista de @Agora_RevOnline a @LolaPodemos <https://t.co/dwx0S6lUcK>

"Negociaré con UE flexibilización deficit público. No permitiré q se recorte aún más estado de bienestar" @sanchezcastejon #CARAAcara2015

Irrelevant tweets:

"En Europa hay 11 países con universidad gratuita, algunos más pobres que España" @agarzon #AndalucíaConGarzón

"#elDBT #GanaCasado @pablocasado_ el 85% de los puestos de trabajo de jóvenes de Europa se crean en España <https://t.co/G01JSFIGMN>"

"Con confianza en que la capitalidad europea de la cultura 2016 sea un éxito para San Sebastián, Euskadi y España. <https://t.co/WYFg4aTJqI>"

Reliability scores for the two employed relevancy classifiers (2015; 2016) are presented in Table 4.3.

Category	Precision	Recall	F-Score	Accuracy
December EU-relevant (leaders)	0.802	0.818	0.810	0.810
June EU-relevant (leaders)	0.897	0.861	0.878	0.820

Tab. 4.3. Reliability scores: political elite, EU-relevant tweets, 2015 and 2016.

Table 4.4 presents our results with regard to the salience of EU-related issues amongst the tweets sent by the Spanish political elite. In the first column, we present the results of our keyword match, i.e. the number of tweets containing at least one of the terms from our dictionary of EU-related keywords. In the second column, we present the actual number of tweets discussing EU-related issues, i.e. tweets that contain at least one of the terms from our dictionary of EU-related keywords and that have been coded as “relevant” by our ad hoc built relevancy classifier. By comparing the first and the second figures, we can clearly see the strength of combining the use of dictionaries with a semi-supervised machine learning approach: by using the dictionary only, in fact, we would have highly overestimated the proportion of EU-related tweets. Finally, in order to allow for inter-party and inter-election comparisons, in the last column we present the weighted result, i.e. the percentage of relevant (EU-related) tweets out of the total number of tweets sent by each party (“all parties” in the last row).

From	Matching EU keywords (N)		Relevant (N)		Relevant (% N tweets sent)	
	2015	2016	2015	2016	2015	2016
Unidad Popular	328	1400	275	1218	0.84	4.32
Podemos	271	1400	168	1218	0.76	4.32
PSOE	331	1125	212	906	0.82	3.33
Ciudadanos	283	807	68	616	0.4	2.79
PP	346	1304	127	733	0.39	1.96
All parties	1559	4,636	850	3473	0.65	3.03

Tab. 4.4. Salience of EU-related tweets: political elite

Considering for the moment the aggregate result only, three main considerations emerge. First, the overall salience of EU-related tweets appears rather low, corresponding to the 0.65% of all tweets sent by the Spanish parties considered in 2015, and to 3.03% in 2016. Second, the proportion of EU-related tweets was significantly higher in the 2016 elections compared to the previous ones. Third, parties differ in the extent to which they discuss EU-related issues, an aspect we deal with extensively in section 4.3.

Importantly, an in contrast with party manifesto research – which measures the salience of EU-related issues out the *total amount of political proposals* made by a party in a party manifesto - our Twitter results are weighted out of the *total amount of tweets* sent by the candidates, thus including also other types of content than political issues, such as, most notably, campaign-related content. Although we consider it more correct to keep weighting results out of the total amount of tweets – both to minimize classification errors and to remain coherent with the nature of the medium analysed - we decided to create an additional structure of classifiers in order to identify all tweets sent by the political elite talking about political issues, and to measure the relative salience of EU-related tweets amongst the latter only. This step grants us a better understanding of the relative salience of EU-related issues, by measuring their percentage not out of the total amount of tweets sent, but only out of the total amount of tweets dealing with political issues – thus excluding, for example, “personal” and “campaign-related” tweets. To improve the performance (and precision) of our classification, we first created an algorithm to generally distinguish between “political” and “not political” content (such as personal or unclear), and second one – applied only to tweets coded as having a political content - to identify tweets discussing proper “political issues”. Reliability scores for the two employed classifiers are presented in Table 4.5 (see table on the next page).

Category	Precision	Recall	F-Score	Accuracy
Political content (December 2015)	0.758	0.825	0.790	0.844
Political content (June 2016)	0.754	0.807	0.780	0.838
Political issues (December 2015)	0.782	0.839	0.809	0.755
Political issues (June 2016)	0.797	0.853	0.824	0.765

Tab. 4.5. Reliability scores: political elite, political content and political issues, 2015 and 2016.

In Table 4.6, results of our political classifiers are presented. In the first column we can see the percentage of tweets sent by the political elite actually dealing with political issues, out of the total number of tweets sent. Interestingly, in line with what has emerged from studies on strategies and styles of political communication on Twitter in Spain (García & Zugasti Azagra, 2014; Zugasti Azagra & Sabés, 2015; Ramos-Serranos, Gómez & Pineda, 2016; López-García, 2016), the percentage of political issues is surprisingly small, suggesting that candidates are using Twitter more to boost campaign-related content – that is, issues related to the development of the election campaign, such as campaign events, configuration of party lists and candidacies, campaign strategies, campaign videos and so on - than to discuss specific policy proposals. In the second column, we present the salience of EU-related issues as a percentage of the total amount of tweets dealing with political issues⁶¹ (and not as a percentage of the total amount of tweets sent, displayed in Table 4.4).

Year	Political issues (% N tweets sent)	Relevant (% N political issues)
December 2015	31.72	2.06
June 2016	31.72	9.41

Tab. 4.6. Relative salience of EU-related issues out of the total amount of political issues debated: political elite

⁶¹ As, at least in the way they have been conceptualized in our work, “EU-related issues” are political issues by definition, to minimize classification errors we have added to the total amount of “political issues” also a small amount of tweets discussing EU-related issues that had been miscoded by our algorithms and assigned to the (wrong) categories of “not political content” or “not political issue”.

Importantly, by weighting our results by considering the amount of tweets dealing with political issues, answering to the question “Have EU-related issues been salient in the Spanish debate?” becomes more difficult. If, in the 2015 elections, we are confident in saying “no”, according to the newly weighted result almost 1 out of 10 of the tweets dealing with political issues discussed European integration. The difficulty arises from the intrinsic challenge of determining a clear threshold in this regard, hence remaining in the framework of an in-depth case study: above and below which percentage can we in fact talk about high, low or medium salience? Answering this question is far from trivial, and the problem is common not only to this study, but also well known amongst all scientists researching EU politicization using data from other platforms such as political statements or news articles. On the one hand, some researchers have attempted to overcome this limit by using comparative research designs and/or relying on longitudinal data, and we agree that the replication of similar analyses over time or across different countries could certainly allow for a better understanding of the evolution of the salience of EU-related issues over time, and help to contextualize the national results. Nevertheless, we argue that even adopting longitudinal or comparative designs, stating the “low” vs. “high” salience of EU-related issues remains an issue of problematic nature: even if we discover that it has increased over time, or that in a certain year it was lower in Spain than in the UK, in fact, we would still not be able to say if EU-related issues are ultimately salient. On the other hand, another strategy some researchers use to overcome this problem is to compare the relative salience of EU-related issues to the salience of other political issues in debate, such as immigration. Such a solution has the merit of showing how EU-related issues are still of low salience if compared to national issues (see Chapter 3 for literature review of works using a similar approach using Twitter data), but it can easily be argued that this is a normal expectation in national elections and that being less salient than national issues does not imply that EU-related issues are not salient. Lastly, as the overall number of political issues into debate is extremely high, researchers using data from the party manifesto project have often underlined how an issue with a salience of few percentage points can

actually be considered of high salience.

Solving such a controversy goes beyond the scope of this work, and for the time being we cannot but suggest this issue as an important question to be addressed by future research. Being forced to take a position, we thus argue that the salience of EU-related issues was *very limited* in the 2015 elections, while, although not crucial, EU-related issues were of a *certain salience* in the 2016 elections. In order to better interpret our findings, in the next section we present the findings of a separate test we run in order to contextualize the Spanish results within a broader comparative framework.

Beside thresholds, the differences between the 2015 and 2016 results allow for the formulation of hypotheses with regard to the dynamics behind increases and decreases in the salience of EU-related issues. As we can see from Tables 4.4 and 4.6, the salience of EU-related issues is higher in the 2016 elections than in the 2015 ones: the overall percentage of tweets sent by the political elite dealing with issues related to European integration moves in fact from 0.65 in 2015 to 3.03 in 2016, and most notably from 2.06 to 9.41 if we look at their proportion out of the total amount of political issue-related tweets. How to explain the different salience accorded to EU-related issues in the two electoral campaigns? Does the 2016 result reflect an overall increased focus on European integration, or does it depend on specific events? To answer this question, in Figure 4.1 we present a timeline representing the number of EU-related tweets sent by the Spanish political elite during each day of the 2016 electoral campaign.

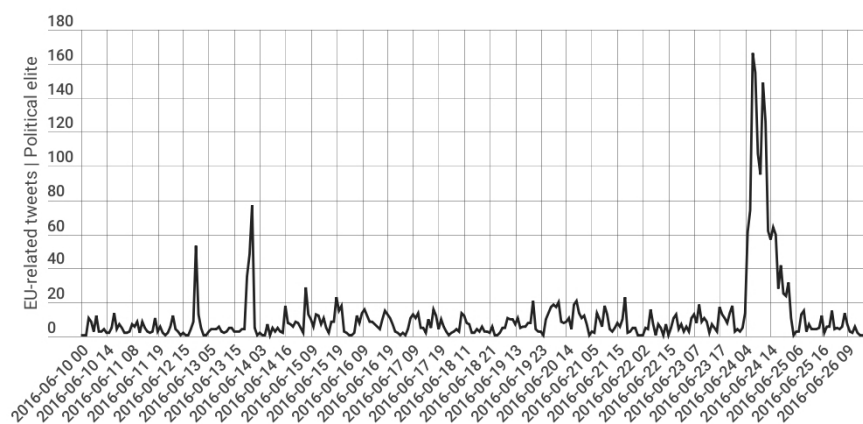


Fig. 4.1. EU-related tweets sent by the political elite over time – June 10-26 2016.

As Figure 4.1 clearly shows, the discussion over European integration is far from following a linear trend: while over the electoral campaign the number of EU-related tweets sent remains low, we see a “peak” in the salience of EU-related issues on 24 June,⁶² in correspondence with the announcement of the results of the UK referendum on European Union membership (“Brexit”, from now on). If the appearance of a peak on Brexit day could have been easily predicted, what is surprising is the outstanding brevity and intensity of it. On the one hand, as we can see from Figure 4.1 the increase in the salience of EU-related tweets occurs on 24 June only, while there is no trace of a “Brexit effect” in the days before and after the announcement of the referendum result. On the other hand, the intensity of the peak is great: on the day the number of EU-related tweets sent is 1,367, against an average of 131 tweets per day during the remainder of the electoral campaign. The increased salience of EU-related issues in 2016 appears thus not to have been a consequence of likewise increased attention dedicated to European integration in the 2016 electoral campaign: if we calculate the percentage of EU-related tweets excluding 24 June, the proportion of tweets related to EU-related issues during the 2016 campaign decreases to 1.83%, a figure more similar to the 2015 result – and this excluding only a single day of tweets. Summing up, the occurrence of Brexit during the 2016 electoral campaign had deep effects on the salience of EU-related issues, as we see also in the next sections. Nevertheless, the increase in salience seems to be due to an “event effect”, with an intense and short peak in correspondence with the announcement of the results of the referendum, a peak which, though, begins and ends within 24 hours. Such a dynamic closely recalls the “cyclical dynamic” identified in some research investigating EU politicization on national newspapers, where scholars have suggested that the evolution of the salience of EU-related issues would not

⁶² Although smaller, other two peaks in the salience of EU-related tweets occur on June 12, in correspondence of the TV debates *Objetivo Economía*, and on June 13, during the only TV debate in which the leading candidates of the four main parties confronted themselves. Nevertheless, while “Brexit” determined a peak in discussions over European integration only, on June 12 and 13 we assist to an overall increase in the number of tweets sent by candidates, thus including – but not being limited to – EU-related tweets.

follow a linear but rather a cyclical trend conditioned by external events (Steenbergen & Scott, 2004; Netjes & Binnema, 2007; Guineaudeau & Palau, 2016).

An experimental attempt to investigate EU-salience in comparative terms: our test on nine European countries

As we discussed in the previous section, interpreting our salience results to ultimately answer the question “Have EU-related issues been salient in the Spanish debate?” is rather controversial, as there is an intrinsic challenge in determining a clear threshold in this regard while remaining in the framework of an in-depth case study. To overcome this limitation, we argue that future research should privilege either longitudinal or comparative research designs, which, although not solving the problem, would allow for cross-time or cross-countries comparison.

In an experimental attempt to investigate EU-salience in comparative terms, in September 2016 we ran a test on nine European countries: Italy, Spain, Greece, France, Portugal, Germany, Poland, the UK and the Netherlands (Arcostanzo & Pagano, 2016).⁶³ From 14 to 20 September we collected tweets sent by the two most popular newspapers in each country according to Alexa rankings, and by the leaders and official accounts of every national political party who won at least one seat in the 2014 European Parliament elections. Similarly our method in our research on the Spanish elections, we also included in our collection citizens’ reactions – in the form of retweets and replies – to the tweets sent by their country’s leaders, parties or newspapers. We then separated conversations on European matters from the rest of the data by scraping all tweets and isolating those containing at least one term from a list of EU-related keywords. On average, the overall salience of EU-related issues on Twitter

⁶³ An article discussing the results of the test titled has been published on EuVisions.eu. Arcostanzo, F., & Pagano, G. *Notes on the Europeanization of Twitter, Part II*. EuVisions. Available at: <http://www.euvisions.eu/notes-europeanization-twitter-part/>

(understood as the share of tweets about the EU of the total collected) in the nine countries gravitates to around 5%. However, the incidence of European topics is quite uneven across countries. As the figure below shows, the share of EU-related tweets ranges from 1.8% in Poland to 11.3% in the United Kingdom. Spain, Greece, the Netherlands and Italy are below the EU average, while France and Portugal are above it. Germany, finally, is located almost exactly at the mean value.

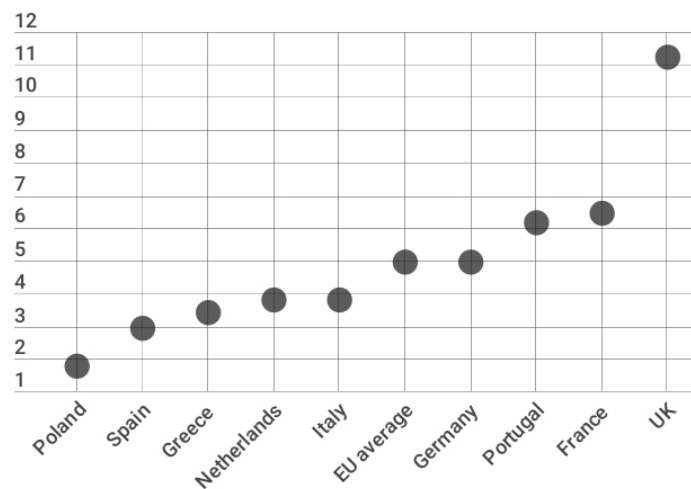


Fig. 4.2. Salience of EU-related tweets in a comparative perspective.

In our test we further broke down the overall salience of EU-related conversations according to the source of the original tweets, i.e. the media or the political sphere. We included in the former all tweets sent by the selected newspapers, their replies and retweets, while in the latter we put tweets sent by political leaders and citizens' retweets of and replies to those tweets. Again, different national patterns of Europeanization emerge: in Greece, Poland and Spain the salience of EU-related conversation is mainly driven by media tweets, while elsewhere it is mostly the political sphere that feeds online discussion about Europe. Interestingly, higher degrees of EU politicization are found in countries where the impact of the political sphere is higher than that of the media: Portugal (+3.4%), France (+6.43%), and even more strikingly the United Kingdom, where the difference between of EU-related political and media tweets is the highest

(+11.58%).

As a second way of comparing the salience of EU-related tweets across countries, in our test we further measured the ‘resonance’ of tweets sent from media or political actors, i.e. the average volume of EU-related tweets triggered – in terms of citizens’ retweets or replies - by each single tweet from media or political actors. We then built a standardized ‘index of reaction’ indicating how much more or less EU-related tweets resonate compared to generic ones (from political as well as media accounts) – so that a value of 0.5 means that EU tweets resonate 50% more than generic ones, and so forth.

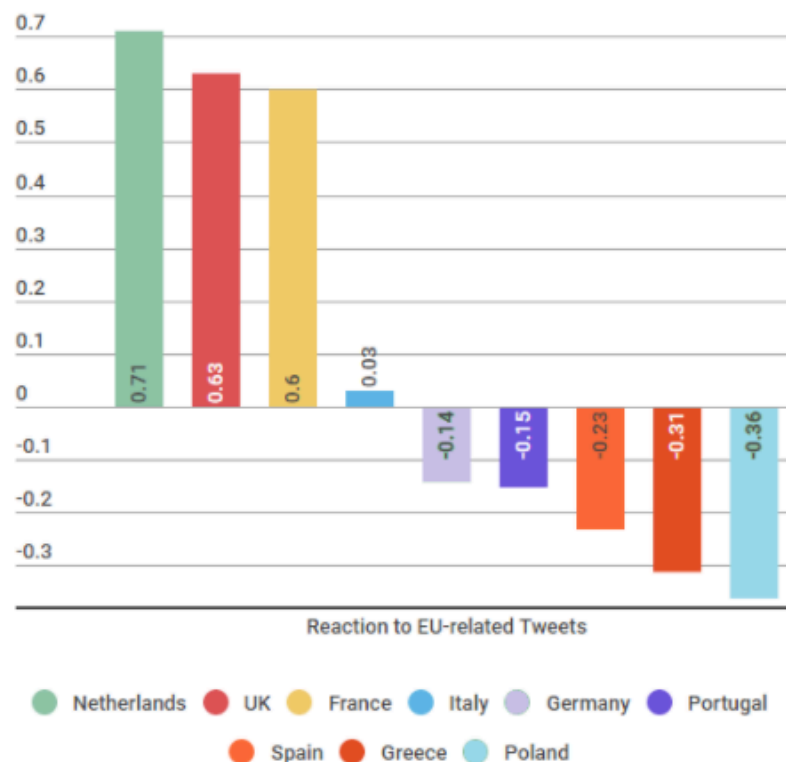


Fig. 4.3 Index of reaction to EU-related tweets

As the graph shows, in the UK, the Netherlands and France, users appear to engage in conversations about the EU or retweet European content with more enthusiasm than they do in general conversations, while for the remaining countries – except Italy, where the two values are roughly the same – the opposite is true. Although the aforementioned study represents an experimental test and its

results would need further validation, findings thus suggest that, despite their contentiousness, the salience of EU-related issues in Spain is lower than in most of the other European countries considered. Understanding the reasons behind such an international variation goes beyond the scope of our work; nevertheless, we advance two hypotheses to be tested in future research with regard to supply-side factors that could have undermined the salience of EU-related issues in the public arena. On the one hand, in Spain there is no successful right-wing populist Eurosceptic party calling for a Spain to withdraw from EU membership. On the other hand, whilst Podemos undoubtedly criticizes the current state of the EU, as we discuss in the following sections, this party does not focus its discourse mainly on EU-related issues, preferring rather to confront its national competitors on national matters. Taken together, these aspects could help to explain the limited salience of issues related to European integration in the last two rounds of Spanish national elections.

4.2.2. Contentiousness

The second dimension of politicization is contentiousness, here measured as the proportion of tweets that are critical towards the EU of the total number of tweets that are not critical (either neutral or positive): the closer the shares, the higher the contentiousness. In this regard, our expectation (H1.b) is that EU-related issues would be contentious both amongst the tweets sent by the Spanish political elite and amongst those sent the general public. In order to isolate critical tweets, we have created an algorithm to identify critical tweets from our sample of EU-related tweets. As already outlined in Chapter 3, it is important to remark that, according to the definition employed in this work, “critical tweets” include different forms of criticism of European integration. More specifically, our category of “critical tweets” includes:

Critical tweets: tweets manifesting a principled opposition to the EU and European integration, either calling for Spain's withdrawal from membership or expressing policy preferences opposed to the whole project of European integration as it is currently conceived, OR tweets expressing a qualified opposition to the EU, either opposing the Union's current or future planned trajectory or manifesting the author's concerns in relation to one or more policy areas.

Examples of critical tweets are quoted below.

Critical tweets:

"Defendemos una Europa libre de la austeridad, una Europa de la solidaridad y de la acogida"
@MiguelUrban <https://t.co/J3Z4GlcJsn>

"Desde la entrada de ESP en la UE se elimina industria para no competir con Francia o Alemania. Ahora lo pagamos" @agarzon #JóvenesConGarzón

.@Caninator : "La UE vende armas a países en conflicto incumpliendo sus propias normas"
<https://t.co/fPapDx9o6u>

@InesArrimadas la única alternativa para España es salir de la UE y el Euro para recobrar algo de su soberanía usurpada.

@Ainhath @pablobustinduy la UE es una mierda reaccionaria y racista y no s Europa. La Pregunta: qeremos otra Europa? pues no a la UE #Brexit

Reliability scores for the two employed classifiers are presented in Table 4.7.

Category	Precision	Recall	F-Score	Accuracy
December EU-critical (leaders)	0.764	0.858	0.808	0.770
June EU-critical (leaders)	0.750	0.720	0.735	0.805

Tab. 4.7. Reliability scores: political elite, critical tweets vs. the EU, 2015 and 2016.

Table 4.8 presents the percentage of critical tweets by party. As we can see from the table, the level of criticism of the EU expressed in the tweets sent by the political elite highly varies between parties, with the percentage of critical tweets moving from a minimum of 12.96% (PP, June 2016) to a maximum of

82.74% (Podemos, December 2016).

From	Critical tweets (N)		Critical tweets (% N EU-related tweets)	
	2015	2016	2015	2016
Unidad Popular	199	845	72.36	69.38
Podemos	139	845	82.74	69.28
PSOE	110	291	51.89	32.12
Ciudadanos	17	186	25	30.19
PP	40	95	31.5	12.96
All parties	505	1417	59.41	40.8

Tab. 4.8. Negativity of EU-related tweets: political elite

Leaving the inter-party comparison for the next section, we can start from our percentages of critical tweets to calculate a Contentiousness index for the two elections. If our axis of contentiousness moves from a minimum of zero (maximum agreement, with 100% of tweets being either critical or not critical) to a maximum of 50 (maximum disagreement, with 50% of tweets being critical and 50% not critical), we can measure the level of contentiousness in terms of absolute distance from the value zero, with value fifty representing the maximum possible level of contentiousness. In our case, this distance equals 40.59 in December 2015, and 40.80 in June 2016. For the purpose of clarity, we can normalize these values in a contentiousness index ranging from 0 to 1, with 0 being the maximum agreement and 1 being the maximum contentiousness. In this case, in both elections the value of our contentiousness index equals 0.81. Final values of contentiousness are represented in Table 4.9.

Year	Critical tweets (%)	Absolute distance	Contentiousness Index
December 2015	59.41	40.59	0.81
June 2016	40.80	40.80	0.81

Tab. 4.9. Contentiousness of EU-related issues: political elite (0=maximum agreement; 1=maximum contentiousness)

As we can see from Table 4.9, the level of contentiousness of EU-related issues is significantly high - being in both elections higher than 0.8 – thus confirming our H1.b. Interestingly, as far as the political elite is concerned, results on EU politicization are mixed: while on the one hand our expectation H1.a appears only partially confirmed, with issues related to European integration being not crucially salient in the 2016 and especially in the 2015 Spanish elections, on the other hand in both elections EU-related issues resulted to be highly contentious. Also, if it is true that the value of our *Contentiousness index* is identical in the two elections, the sentiment directionality is different: while in December 2015 59.41% of EU-related tweets sent by the Spanish political elite is critical towards the current state of the European project, in June 2016 the percentage of critical tweets decreases to 40.8. To account for the differences between the two elections, in the next section we look at inter-party variations with regard to both the relative salience of EU-related issues and their controversy.

4.3. Issue emphasis and euroscepticism amongst the Spanish political elite: testing the inverted-U curve hypothesis

After having examined the overall salience and contentiousness of EU-related issues amongst the Spanish political elite, we now look at the variance in salience and criticism across parties in order to see if parties differ in the extent to which they politicize the EU in their online electoral campaigns. In this regard, our main expectations are:

H3.a. We expect candidates of parties with extreme ideological stances (Unidad Popular, Podemos⁶⁴) to make more use of tweets associated with the EU dimension of political competition;

H3.b. We expect candidates of parties with extreme ideological stances (Unidad Popular, Podemos) to make more use of tweets that criticize the EU.

⁶⁴ “Unidos Podemos” in the 2016 Spanish general elections (cfr. cap 2)

Considering that, as we discuss in the next section, we expect the market-making vs. market-correcting line of conflict to play a significant role in structuring online contestation of the EU (H2.a), further:

H3.c. We expect EU-related issues to be more salient amongst the tweets sent by candidates of left-wing moderate parties (PSOE) than in those sent by candidates of right-wing moderate parties (PP, Ciudadanos);

H3.d. We expect candidates of left-wing moderate parties (PSOE) to make more use of tweets that criticize the EU than candidates from right-wing moderate parties (PP, Ciudadanos).

To answer our RQ3 (“Do parties differ in the extent to which they politicize the EU in their online electoral campaigns?”), in Table 4.10 we present the percentages of EU-related tweets and of critical tweets sent by candidates and representatives of each party in the 2015 and 2016 electoral campaigns.

From	EU-related tweets (% N tweets sent)		Critical tweets (% N EU-related tweets)	
	2015	2016	2015	2016
Unidad Popular	0.84	4.32	72.36	69.38
Podemos	0.76	4.32	82.74	69.38
PSOE	0.82	3.33	51.89	32.12
Ciudadanos	0.4	2.79	25	30.19
PP	0.39	1.96	31.5	12.96

Tab. 4.10. Relative salience and negativity of EU-related tweets by party, 2015 and 2016

4.3.1. Selective issue emphasis

Although overall EU-related issues resulted in being only partially salient, if

we look at the distribution of EU-related tweets across the different parties presented in Table. 4.10 we can see that our expectations regarding the relationship between party positioning on the left-right axis and the selective emphasis accorded to issues related to European integration appears to be to a great extent confirmed. In order to allow for a more insightful interpretation of our results, findings are visually represented in Figure 4.4 (December 2015) and in Figure 4.5 (June 2016). On the X axes, parties are ordered according to their positioning on the left-right axis on the basis of their L-R scores in the 2014 Chapel Hill expert survey.⁶⁵

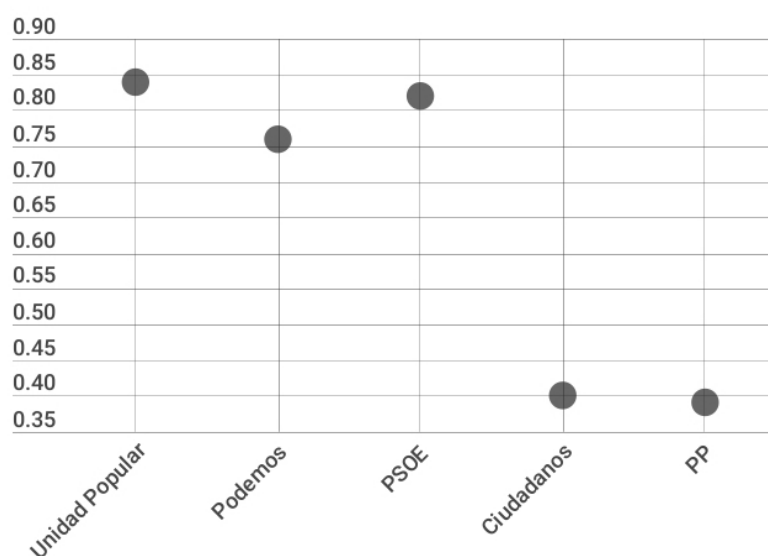


Fig. 4.4. Relative salience of EU-related tweets by party, 2015

As we can see in Figure 4.4, in the 2015 elections our expectations are generally confirmed: candidates of parties with extreme ideological stances (Unidad Popular, Podemos) are actually more likely to make use of tweets associated with the EU dimension of political competition (H3.a), and EU-related issues resulted in being more salient amongst tweets sent by candidates of left-wing moderate parties (PSOE) than in those sent by candidates of right-wing

⁶⁵ Parties L-R positioning in terms of their overall ideological stance according to the 2014 Chapel Hill expert Survey (0=extreme left; 5=center; 10=extreme right): Podemos = 1.67; Izquierda Unida = 2.00; PSOE= 3.80; Ciudadanos = 5.56; PP = 7.30.

moderate parties (PP, Ciudadanos) (H3.c). Nevertheless, at least with regard to salience, the distribution of our 2015 results does not suggest the existence of a clear cut distinction between moderate parties and parties at the extreme of the political spectrum, but more a traditional left-right divide: an higher salience of EU-related issues is in fact observable in the whole left area of the political spectrum - Unidad Popular (0.84%), Podemos (0.76%), PSOE (0.82%) - while discussions over EU-related issues are almost absent amongst parties located at the center-right of the X axis (Ciudadanos, PP).

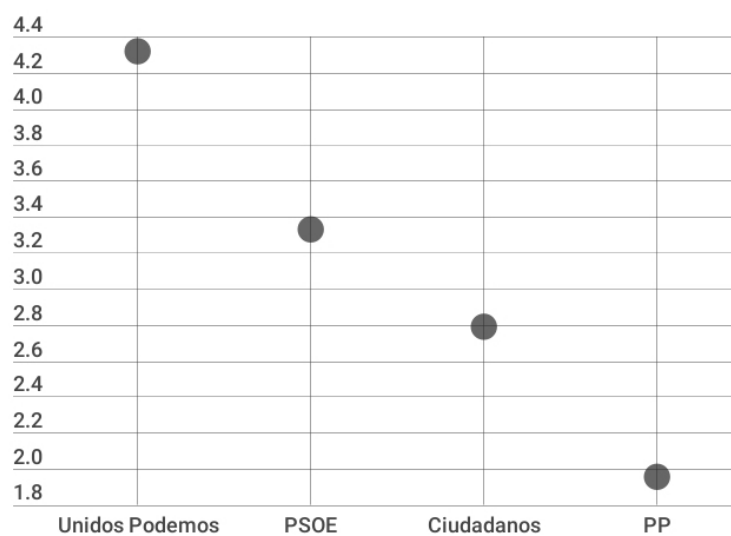


Fig. 4.5. Relative salience of EU-related tweets by party, 2016

On the other hand, a clearer difference between parties located at the extreme left of the political spectrum (Unidos Podemos) and parties at the centre-left (PSOE) emerges in the 2016 elections, where parties' distribution matches more closely an inverted-U curve. Unidos Podemos, the electoral coalition between Podemos and Izquierda Unida, is confirmed as the political force more likely to discuss issues related to European integration (4.32%), followed at some distance by PSOE (3.33%). Albeit now differentiating themselves from their equivalent at the extreme left, in line with H3.c, members of PSOE's political elite maintain a higher likelihood to engage in discussions over European integration if compared to Ciudadanos (2.79%) and PP (1.96%).

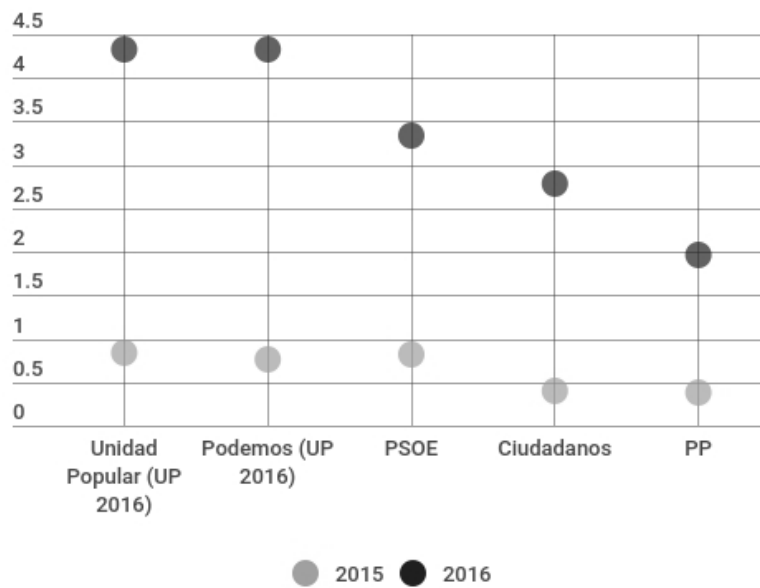


Fig. 4.6. Relative salience of EU-related tweets by party, 2015 and 2016

To allow for a better comparison between the two elections, in Figure 4.6 both results are plotted. As we can see from the figure, the overall distribution of EU-related tweets during both elections is in line with our expectations, with a higher salience accorded to EU-related issues by fringe parties from the left, followed by moderate parties from the left and finally by moderate parties from the right. The only significant change between 2015 and 2016 regards the position of PSOE. If its behavior during the 2015 elections emphasizes the importance of the left-right divide in shaping parties' likelihood to bring EU-related issues in the public debate, its distance from Unidos Podemos in 2016 returns a picture in which parties located at the extremes of the political spectrum – in the Spanish case, the left-wing extreme only – are in fact those more willing to emphasize EU-related issues in their online debates. To complete our understanding of parties' strategies and positions over European integration in the two elections, we now take into account parties' measured levels of criticism towards the EU.

4.3.2. Levels of criticism towards the EU

Parallel to the representation of the relative salience accorded to EU-related

issues by Spanish parties, Figures 4.7 and 4.8 represent the relative controversy of EU-related issues, expressed in terms of the percentage of critical tweets out of the total amount of EU-related tweets sent by each party.

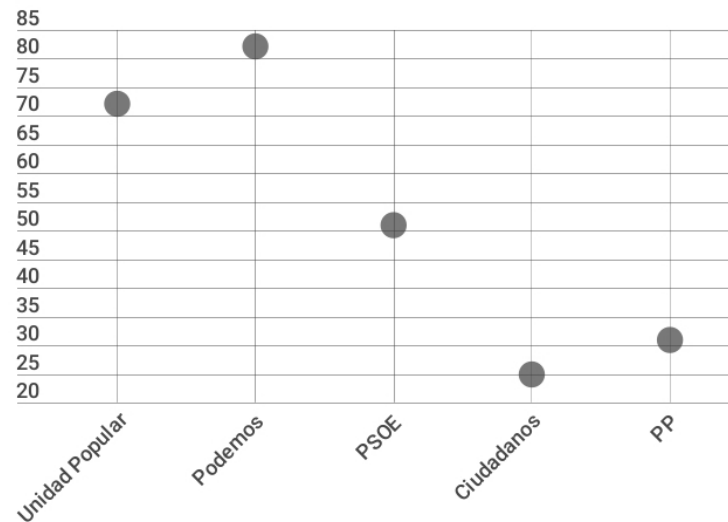


Fig. 4.7. Parties' levels of criticism of the current state of European integration, 2015

Starting from the December elections, results displayed in Figure 4.7 fully confirm our H3.b and H3.d: in line with our expectations, the parties more likely to make use of tweets to criticize the EU are in fact those located at the extreme left of the political spectrum – Unidad Popular (72.36%) and Podemos (82.74%) – followed by PSOE. Also, although PSOE is less critical of European integration than parties located to its left, in line with our H3.d its criticism towards the EU (51.89%) is significantly higher than that expressed by the moderate parties from the center-right, Ciudadanos (25%) and PP (31.5%).

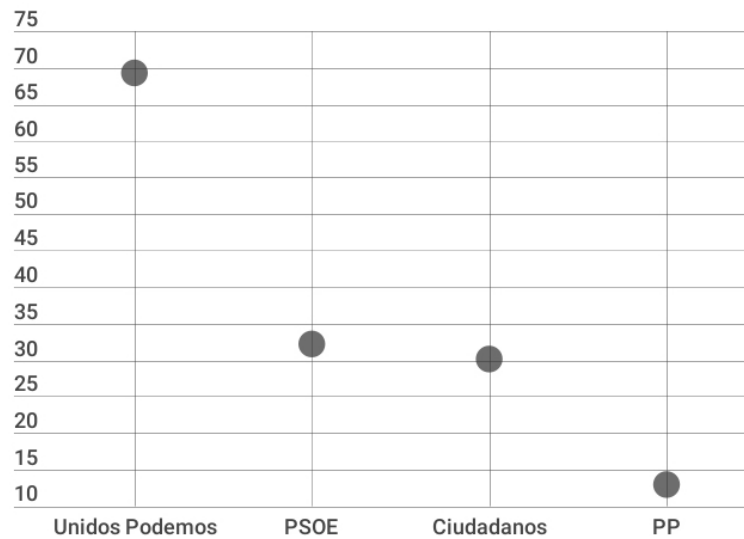


Fig. 4.8. Parties' level of criticism vs. the current state of European integration, 2016

Interestingly, the scenario depicted in Figure. 4.8, on the basis of our 2016 results, presents both commonalities and differences with that which emerged in 2015. On the one hand, the extreme-left coalition Unidos Podemos confirms itself as the political force most critical towards the EU (69.38%), thus re-confirming our H3.b. On the other hand, PSOE's position (32.12%) is now extremely close to that of Ciudadanos (30.19%), while both parties remain more critical than PP, whose percentage of critical tweets is limited to 12.96%. Although moving from 2015 to 2016 the percentage of critical tweets has lowered for all parties, as we can clearly see in Figure 4.9 the most interesting change regards PSOE's position, whose discourse has moved from being slightly critical in 2015 to significantly more supportive in 2016, as we clarify in the next paragraph.

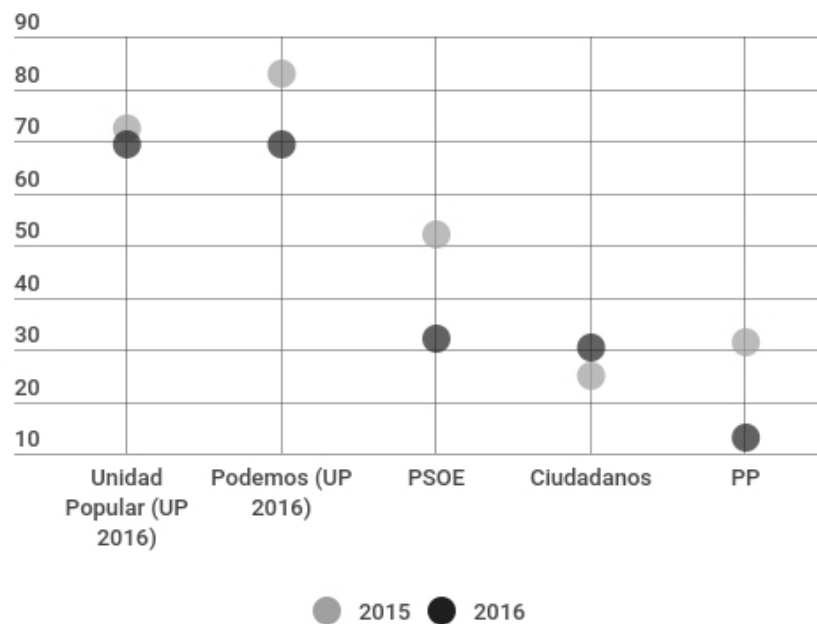


Fig. 4.9. Parties' level of criticism vs. the current state of European integration, 2015 and 2016

Considering together our results on the selective emphasis accorded by different parties to EU-related issues and their evaluative positioning, we can see how both our expectation of an increased salience of EU-related issues amongst parties located at the extreme of the political spectrum, and our expectation of a more critical stance adopted by peripheral parties appear confirmed. In line with our theoretical framework, the two dimensions result in being complementary: parties that are critical towards the EU – such as Unidad Popular and Podemos – not only tend to send an increased amount of EU-related tweets, but are also overall more likely to criticize European integration in their tweets. On the other hand, parties that are not willing to criticize the EU – such as PP and Ciudadanos – not only are less critical of the EU when discussing EU-related issues, but also tend to deemphasize issues related to European integration in their online discourse. In Figure 4.10 all our findings are represented in a scatterplot: parties' positioning on the X axis is determined by their percentage of negative tweets about the EU, while their position on the Y axis is determined by the percentage of EU-related tweets sent. As we can see from the picture, the two dimensions are highly correlated: the more a party is critical towards the EU, the more vocal it is on EU-related issues.

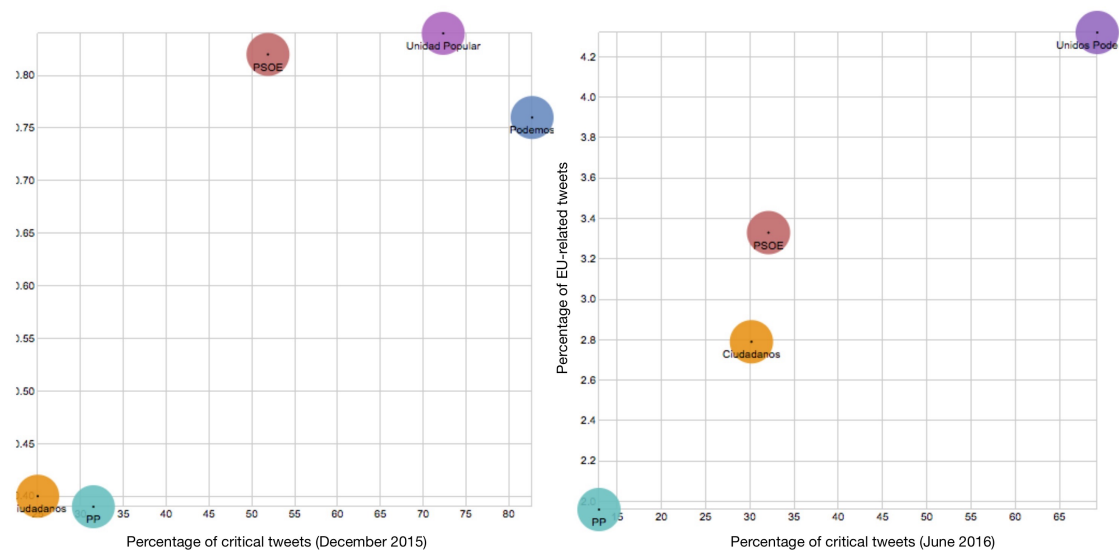


Fig. 4.10. EU-related issues: salience and criticism at confrontation, 2015 and 2016

In the next paragraph we finally present our insights on the content of critical tweets, identifying the most critical issues and commenting on our results in relation to the four lines of conflict outlined in our theoretical framework.

4.4 Criticizing Europe on Twitter: calling for a more social and solidarist European Union

In the previous paragraphs we have presented our quantitative results with regard to the Spanish political elite and the extent to which its members politicized EU-related issues during the 2015 and 2016 elections. Summing up, EU-related issues have proved to be less salient than our expectations, but nevertheless extremely contentious. Comparing the two elections, we can see how the salience of EU-related issues was greater in 2016: an increase explained by the simultaneous occurrence of Brexit, which determined a rapid and short peak in online discussions over European integration, thus influencing the overall salience of EU-related issues in the considered period. Moreover, our expectations with regard to different parties' engagements with EU-related issues have proved to be correct, with peripheral leftist parties being both more willing to discuss European integration and more critical of it. Amongst the considered parties, PSOE changed

most between the two elections, moving from a euro-critical discourse to a euro-supportive one. Before discussing our findings with regard to the Spanish public(s) in Chapter 5, in this section we look at the content of critical tweets sent by candidates of different parties, in order to identify the main criticisms of the EU and the extent to which they can be tracked back to our four lines of conflict, thus answering to our RQ2.1 (“Which are the issues most often associated with criticism towards European integration in the 2015 and 2016 electoral campaigns?”) and RQ2.2 (“To what extent are the critical issues emerging in the online debate ascribable to the four outlined lines of conflict?”). In line with the theoretical framework presented in Chapters 1 and 2:

H2.a. We expect the 1st (*market-making vs. market correcting*), 2nd (*integration-autonomy*) and 4th (*core-periphery*) lines of conflict to play a significant role in structuring political contestation with the EU;

H2.b. We expect the 3rd line of conflict (*free movement-national closure*) to play no significant role in structuring political contestation.

As we have seen in the previous paragraphs, Podemos and Unidad Popular - as well as their 2016 electoral coalitions Unidos Podemos – are the parties whose tweets are more critical towards the EU, followed by PSOE. Starting from the last, we here present PSOE’s main criticisms with regard to the current state of the EU and attempt an explanation for its positional shift – from more critical tones, to a more positive attitude – in the light of the different contexts in which the 2015 and 2016 campaigns were held. Afterwards, we conclude this chapter by focusing on the discourse of Podemos and Unidad Popular, identifying the main traits characterizing their type of opposition to the EU.

4.4.1. PSOE: social Europe, Brexit, and the spectre of populism

While the two parties from the extreme left maintained a similar position

with regard to European integration in the two elections – strongly criticizing the current state of the EU and its democratic deficit, calling for the end of austerity policies and for a “more solidarist” European Union – the Spanish Social-Democratic Party has modified its discourse moving from the 2015 to the 2016 elections, abandoning in the latter its criticism towards the EU.

How to account for such a great change in PSOE’s expressed attitudes towards the EU? By taking into account the context in which the elections were held, the literature on party competition, and the content of PSOE’s tweets, we can advance a possible explanation based both on PSOE’s strategic convenience and on the substantive issues under debate. In terms of patterns of party competition, the emergence of Podemos as a significant political force in 2015 is likely to have forced PSOE to undertake a more critical discourse against the EU, in order to limit the loss of leftist voters and to distance itself from the neoliberal positions adopted by PP. Recent studies have in fact shown that the politicization of European integration in the domestic political arena is subject to inter-party dynamics. On the one hand, the literature on issue evolution and issue ownership argues that parties compete with one another on the basis of selective issue emphasis (Carmines & Stimson, 1986; Petrocik, 1996; Schattschneider, 1960), mobilizing different issues and trying to gain competitive advantage by emphasizing those issues (Petrocik, 1996; Schattschneider, 1960). Hence, attempting to uncover the patterns underlying different salience strategies of parties with regards to EU-related issues, researchers have demonstrated how the emergence of successful Eurosceptic challenger parties, who accord a higher salience to the issue of European integration, is capable of increasing the salience accorded to the same issue by mainstream parties (Green-Pedersen, 2012; Hutter & Grande, 2014; van de Wardt, 2015; van de Wardt et al., 2014). On the other hand, applications of Downs’ spatial theory of party competition have shown empirically that parties adjust their positioning on policy issues in the face of the positional shifts and electoral gains of their competitors (Adams & Somer-Topcu, 2009). As a consequence, “the more successful outsider parties are, the less established parties can afford to remain unqualified supporters of further

integration” (Hooghe & Marks, 2009). By combining together insights from spatial theory and issue evolution theory in a single explanatory model of party change, Meijers (2015) demonstrated that

the electoral success of Eurosceptic challenger parties can provoke mainstream parties to be less supportive of European integration; the influence is conditioned by the mean salience that Eurosceptic challengers allocate to European integration issues. Moreover, centre-left parties are on average more affected by Eurosceptic challenger success, since they are potentially affected by Eurosceptic contagion both from the radical left and radical right” (ibid., pp. 7-8).

The behaviour of PSOE during the 2015 Spanish elections can thus be explained in the light of Meijers’s model: the increased importance and increased level of criticism accorded by Podemos and Unidad Popular to EU-related issues forced PSOE to adopt a more critical stance to European integration, thus distancing itself from “Merkel’s ally”, the pro-European PP.

The 2015 campaign: “A stronger Spain in a more social Europe”

As we will see in the next section, the call for a more social and solidarist Europe is a characterizing element of the whole criticism advanced by Podemos and Unidad Popular towards the EU, more than is the case with PSOE’s discourse. Nevertheless, the need for a more social Europe is expressed in several 2015 campaign tweets by PSOE’s candidates, who positioned themselves in favour of “a more social Europe” and against “the present economic Europe”, which they accused of favouring the interests of the right:

PSdeG (PSdeG). ".@PiliCancela aposta "por unha Europa social, fronte a Europa económica que defende a dereita". #SermosDebate". 07 Dec 2015, 11:37 UTC. Tweet



The defence of a more social Europe passes through less stringent rules with regard to the public debt-to-GDP ratio. On the one hand, in the short term the party committed to negotiating a budget flexibilization with the EU and to the abolition of the current labour law:

(PSC), Socialistes (socialistes_cat). ""Negociaré con UE flexibilización deficit público.No permitiré q se recorte aún más estado de bienestar" @sanchezcastejon #CARAaCARA2015". 14 Dec 2015, 21:33 UTC. Tweet

Merchán, Carlota (CarlotaMerchn). "UE pide completar reforma laboral y + ajustes tras 20D. @PSOE derogaremos reforma laboral ¿Vas a permitir q las derechas hagan + recortes?". 07 Dec 2015, 08:43 UTC. Tweet

On the other hand, PSOE's candidate Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez made a commitment to reform the Spanish Constitution by modifying the controversial Article 135, introduced in 2011 to force all public administrations to comply with the principle of budgetary stability, forbidding them to incur a deficit position above the thresholds defined in the Stability and Growth Pact:

Alvarez, Angeles (AAlvarezAlvarez). "RT PSOE: 33. Una reforma constitucional para una Europa social #CARAAcara2015 #PedroPresidente sanchezcastejon <https://t.co/PqEpI9IXbi>". 14 Dec 2015, 22:37 UTC. Tweet

Casares, Pedro (pedro_casares). "Queremos completar la reforma del artículo 135 estableciendo también en la Constitución la estabilidad social @sanchezcastejon en @HoyPorHoy". 17 Dec 2015, 08:28 UTC. Tweet

PSOE (PSOE). "La lectura que se ha hecho del 135 desde el Gobierno es la más radical. Modificarlo para blindar los Dchos Sociales #UnFuturoParaLaMayoría". 04 Dec 2015, 08:48 UTC. Tweet

Nevertheless, in contrast with Podemos and Unidad Popular, the PSOE avoided addressing its criticism to the supranational level. For the problems identified - which ultimately regard the problematic effects of the economic crisis on the *Spanish* economy only, without contextualizing them in a broader ideological opposition - responsibilities are mainly attributed to the previous Rajoy government, which forced Spain to ask for EU financial assistance while subordinating his political agenda to Germany:

Rodríguez-Piñero, I. (RodriguezPinero). "El PP se olvida q fue este gobierno quien elevó la prima de riesgo por encima de los 640 y tuvo q pedir un rescate financiero a la troika". 13 Dec 2015, 17:23 UTC. Tweet

Alvarez, Angeles (AAlvarezAlvarez). "RT PSOE: Hemos echado de menos actitud constructiva del gobierno de España en materia europea. Solo sigue a Merkel sanchezcastejon #CARAaCA...". 14 Dec 2015, 22:52 UTC. Tweet

At the same time, against the austerity policies of PP and the populism and euroscepticism of Podemos, a victory for PSOE is presented as the only chance for a “stronger Spain” in a “more social Europe”:

Fernández, Jonás (jonasfernandez). “Necesitamos un gobierno de @sanchezcastejon para que Europa no nos impongan más recortes @jonasfernandez #VotaPSOE <https://t.co/pDwB2K5iAX>”. 09 Dec 2015, 19:11 UTC. Tweet

Fernández, Jonás (jonasfernandez). "Solo @sanchezcastejon en el Consejo de Europa como Presidente de España puede ayudar a cambiar las políticas europeas dice @jonasfernandez". 09 Dec 2015, 19:09 UTC. Tweet

The 2016 campaign: Brexit and PSOE's positional shift

The claims advanced by PSOE's representatives and candidates during the 2015 campaign are still present in the critical tweets sent during the 2016 campaign. Together with the issues that emerged in 2015, in 2016 two additional topics entered PSOE's agenda: an attack of the management of the refugee crisis, articulated both at the national and at the European level, and an accusation that Mariano Rajoy had committed, with the European Commission, to further cuts to social expenditure:

Tundidor, Begona (emeterina). "Ante la falta de compromiso de Rajoy, el @PSOE apuesta por una Europa de las personas y solidaria #RefugioporDerecho <https://t.co/GnPpAn0AIU>". 20 Jun 2016, 19:01 UTC. Tweet

Matarin, Eva (evamatarin). "Para que el himno de Europa vuelva a ser una oda a la humanidad y no a la vergÜEnza #RefugioYA #UERfanos <https://t.co/5UXc4EBE92>". 20 Jun 2016, 10:54 UTC. Tweet

PSOE (PSOE). "Rajoy dice en España que no hará más recortes y en Europa que sí los hará. @sanchezcastejon #UnSíPorElMundoRural <https://t.co/q2P058qJCR>". 16 Jun 2016, 18:44 UTC. Tweet

Nevertheless, if the call for a more social Europe was highly emphasized in PSOE's 2015 tweets, in section 4.3 we have seen how in 2016 the party significantly lowered its level of criticism towards the EU, with critical tweets becoming a minor component of its discourse on European integration. How to account for such a positional shift? As already given in the case of salience, an analysis of the frequency of negative tweets over time during the 2016 electoral campaign can allow us to advance a plausible explanation of the changed discursive strategy of the socialist party. Figures 4.12, 4.13 and 4.14 present the evolution over time of the proportions of critical and not-critical tweets from Unidos Podemos, PP and PSOE respectively. As we can see from Figure 4.12, amongst the tweets sent by candidates and representatives from Unidos Podemos critical tweets exceed non-critical tweets along the whole electoral campaign. Although the occurrence of Brexit on 24 June determines an increase in the share of non-critical tweets, negative tweets remain prevalent.

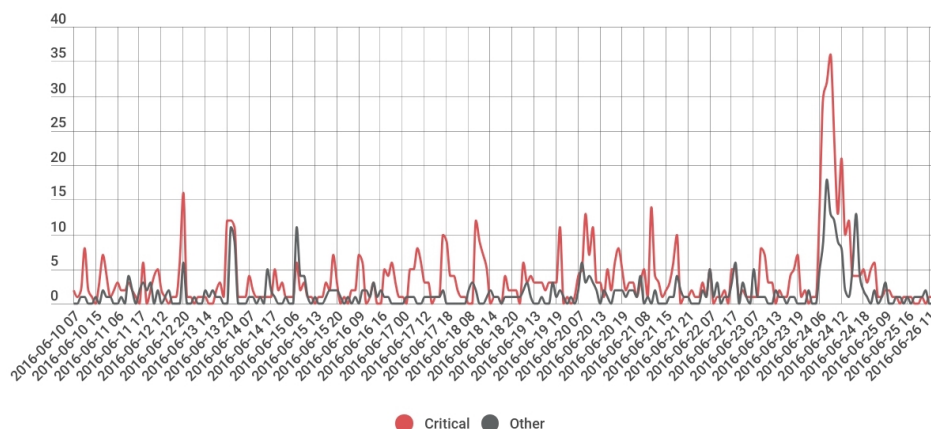


Fig. 4.12. Unidos Podemos's critical vs. not critical tweets over time, 2016

The same situation emerges, with opposite directionality, from the representation of PP's tweets over time: in this case, positive tweets are by far more prominent along the whole electoral campaign in Figure 4.11.

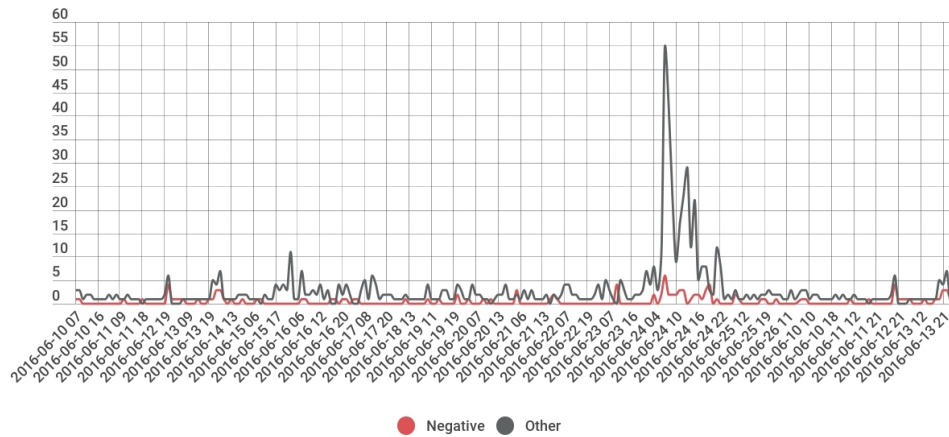


Fig. 4.13. PP's critical vs. not critical tweets over time, 2016

On the contrary, if we look at the PSOE's distribution of positive and negative tweets over time, a different picture emerges. As we can see from Figure 4.14, for the first two weeks of the electoral campaign PSOE's politicians made a more balanced use of critical and non-critical tweets, with a small imbalance in favour of non-critical tweets. Nevertheless, the predominance of non-critical tweets becomes striking on 24 June, when the result of the Brexit referendum was announced.

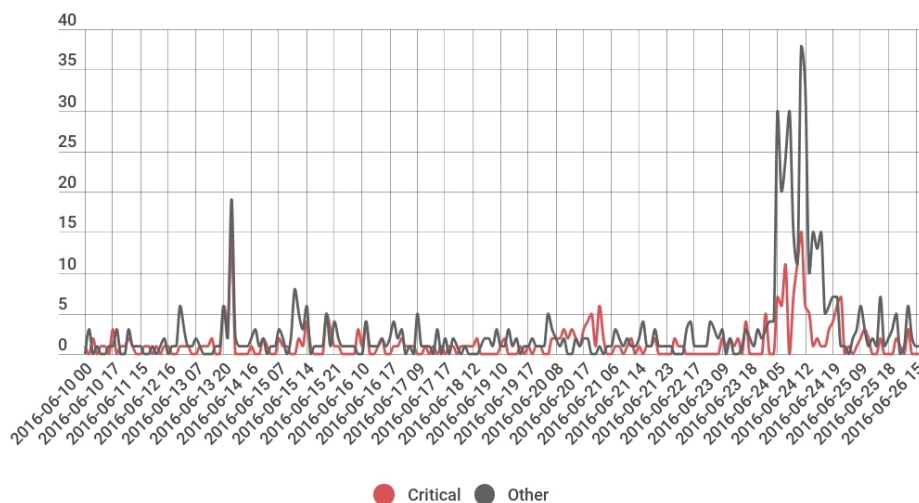


Fig. 4.14. PSOE's critical vs. not critical tweets over time, 2016

By focusing on the content of the tweets sent on 24 June, the reasons behind PSOE's positional shift become clearer. On the one hand, as we will see in detail in the next chapter, the occurrence of Brexit determines an overall shift in the EU-related topics under debate: if in 2015 the focus was on specific policies – and austerity policies in particular - toward which criticism was addressed, in 2016 a wider debate on EU membership emerges in reaction to the UK referendum. Anticipating the results presented in next chapter, the Spanish public opinion proved to be highly in favour of EU membership, and highly critical towards the “irresponsibility” of the “populist discourse” of Eurosceptic parties all over Europe. Although Unidos Podemos remarked several times during the campaign that it never advanced any proposal of “Espexit”, the party has often been criticized for its markedly critical position towards the EU. Looking at the content of PSOE's tweets, we can see how the party took advantage of such a climate of opinion, and used it as an opportunity to attack Podemos's leadership for its lack of responsibility:

Maria, Jesus (jesusmariafer). "El líder xenofobo del Brexit dice en Inglaterra lo mismo que Podemos y sus socios tardocomunistas dicen en España. <https://t.co/81ft6LY23Q>". 24 Jun 2016, 08:52 UTC. Tweet

Gutierrez, Sergio (Sergio_GP). "Parece q tanto IU como Podemos votaron con Frente Nacional en Feb 2016 por la salida del Euro #Populismo <https://t.co/GySKx3CRAz>". 15 Jun 2016, 13:13 UTC. Tweet

Rodríguez-Piñero, I. (RodriguezPinero). "@sevillajordi en el debate economía de @el_pais El PP ofrece más de lo mismo Unidos Podemos, situará a España fuera del euro". 15 Jun 2016, 21:19 UTC. Tweet

Also in this case, the Social-DemocraticPSOE party took a chance to present itself as the only viable candidate able to drive Spain and Europe out of the present situation of social crisis and political instability:

Simancas, Rafael (SimancasRafael). "Los extremismos y populismos solo traen desgracias. Los avances en derechos y libertades llegan con reformismo socialista #Brexit #VotaPSOE". 24 Jun 2016, 08:48 UTC. Tweet

Pepe Martínez Olmos (PmOlmos). "La UE requiere un impulso social desde liderazgos fuertes y comprometidos. El socialismo democrático debe asumir un rol relevante". 25 Jun 2016, 11:31 UTC. Tweet

PSOE (PSOE). "El problema no es la UE, es la derecha que gobierna Europa. Juntos somos más fuertes para conseguir una Europa solidaria #VoteRemain #EUref". 23 Jun 2016, 11:10 UTC. Tweet

Finally, discussing which type of Europe could better address the present challenges, PSOE's position goes in the direction of "more Europe", sympathizing with a federalist model of the EU:

patxilopez (patxilopez). "La solución nunca puede ser irse. Todo lo contrario. Hay que ceder soberanía para construir una Europa unida y diferente. #VoteRemain". 23 Jun 2016, 12:29 UTC. Tweet

Rodríguez, Soraya (sorayapsoe). "La extrema derecha europea nacionalista, xenófoba celebra #Brexit. Hoy más que nunca, más Europa y más democracia.". 24 Jun 2016, 06:28 UTC. Tweet

When abstracting from the specific claims emerging from PSOE's tweets, our lines of conflict prove to be a powerful instrument for understanding the bigger picture of PSOE's criticism. First of all, most of the EU criticism raised in PSOE's tweets relate to the market-making vs. market-correcting line of conflict: in line with its left-wing ideology, PSOE favours a market-correcting approach, defending social democracy, calling for budget flexibilization and committing to a Constitutional reform to secure social rights rather than budgetary stability. Together with the strategic calculation outlined above, the central role played by the market-making vs. market-correcting line of conflict in framing PSOE's opposition to the current state of the EU also accounts for the decreased level of criticism in the 2016 campaign. The entry of EU-related issues into the 2015 Spanish electoral campaign was mainly due to anti-austerity claims advanced by Podemos and Unidad Popular. In this climate, the centrality of the market-making vs. market-correcting line of conflict encouraged PSOE to underline in its tweets its position in favour of market-correcting policies. On the other hand, as the citizens' results presented in next chapter show more clearly, the centrality of the Brexit issue in the 2016 campaign modified the debate and shaped the conversations into a broader pro- or anti-EU discourse, inducing PSOE to emphasize its pro-European character in contrast with the Euroscepticism of its left-wing competitors. With regard to the core-periphery tension, although it did

not address explicitly the existence of a North-South divide, the party criticized and challenged the continuation of the austerity measures imposed since the beginning of the crisis. In contrast, the party positioning on the integration-autonomy line of conflict is more ambiguous: if discursively the party criticized the lack of centrality of Spain in EU policy-making, its preferences in terms of European governance point in the direction of a federal model. Finally, in line with our expectations, intra-EU mobility did not appear as an issue for the Spanish social-democratic party: the only references to migration flows regard the refugee crisis, the management of which is criticized from a solidarist perspective.

4.4.2. Podemos, Unidad Popular and Unidos Podemos: claims for a solidarist and anti-austerity European Union

We conclude the analysis of parties' criticism of the EU by identifying the most relevant issues raised by Podemos, Unidad Popular and their 2016 electoral coalition Unidos Podemos. Although we are aware of the differences existing between Podemos and IU, the commonalities in the criticisms they addressed to the EU are such that we can consider their tweets together to identify the main dimensions along which their candidates and representatives criticized the EU. For the same reasons, while the PSOE positional shift was better explained by a comparison between the two campaigns, we here present our 2015 and 2016 results together, and focus on the Brexit issue as a topic *per se*.

To give a first picture of the parties' criticisms of the EU, in Figures 4.15 and 4.16 we use a tag cloud to show the keywords most often associated to critical tweets.



Fig. 4.15. Most frequent words in critical tweets from Podemos and Unidad Popular. 2015 tag cloud.



Fig. 4.16. Most frequent words in critical tweets from Unidos Podemos. 2016 tag cloud.

As the tag clouds suggests, Podemos and IU criticized the EU with respect to several issues, amongst which austerity stands out most notably. Nevertheless, by going through all the tweets sent by the parties in the two campaigns we have identified two main discourses: in order of importance, an attack on the “anti-solidaristic” character of the present EU, and a call for “taking sovereignty back”. Interestingly, by exploding these two macro-issues in all their facets we can see how the concepts of solidarity and sovereignty are not used in a monolithic way, but rather articulated in reference to different actors.

Against an anti-solidaristic Europe

Urbán Crespo, Miguel (MiguelUrban). ""Defendemos una Europa libre de la austeridad, una Europa de la solidaridad y de la acogida" @MiguelUrban <https://t.co/J3Z4GlcJsn>". 10 Dec 2015, 11:12 UTC. Tweet

The tweet from Podemos MEP Miguel Urbán Crespo represents a good example of Podemos' and IU's solidarist claims with regard to the current state of the EU. As mentioned by the Podemos MEP, the party calls for the defence of a European Union "free from austerity", a "solidarist" and "welcoming" Europe. The call for a solidarist Europe is the most prominent and interesting feature of Podemos and IU's discourse with regard to the EU. But what do the candidates mean exactly when referring to a "more solidarist" Union? From an in-depth analysis of tweets' contents we have been able to identify the different subjects in relation to which the EU is considered as currently not solidarist. First of all, the EU is accused to lack solidarity with its *people*, who are suffering and paying the costs of a crisis that has not been caused by them:

Díaz, Yolanda (Yolanda_Diaz_). ".@Yolanda_Diaz_, a @OwenJones84: "A UE está demostrado a súa auténtica faciana fronte ás clases populares" <https://t.co/dv74Ajd15V>". 14 Dec 2015, 19:44 UTC. Tweet

Urbán Crespo, Miguel (MiguelUrban). ".@MiguelUrban "Actualmente, en Europa se adoptan medidas dirigidas contra las clases populares" #RivasSonríe <https://t.co/ZRk5QD3jE4>". 13 Jun 2016, 18:12 UTC. Tweet

Together with a more general complaint against supranational authorities, the main criticism is here addressed to the "unfair" austerity policies, imposed by the EU with the complicity of the national governments, and most notably of the Spanish PP and PSOE:

PODEMOS (ahorapodemos). ""Las políticas de austeridad han provocado un enorme dolor social y son ineficaces" @Pablo_Iglesias_". 10 Jun 2016, 10:54 UTC. Tweet

Miguel Urbán Crespo (MiguelUrban). "¿Dónde están todas estas diferencias cuando votan juntos en Europa contra la gente? #GranCoalición #NOaTTIP #CaraACaraL6 #ElVerdaderoDebate". 14 Dec 2015, 22:05 UTC. Tweet

Several reasons are behind Podemos' and IU's criticisms of austerity measures: if the main argument is likely to be the defence of the welfare state and of social rights, in their tweets candidates also address their unfairness, their ineffectiveness, their unequal character and, last but not least, their continuity with a market-oriented view of European integration, which is highly contested by both

parties. Below are some examples for each of the identified categories:

Welfare state and social rights

Bustinduy, Pablo (pbustinduy). ""En Europa han dado un golpe de estado. El estado de bienestar ha durado 60 años". @pbustinduy #ContigoEnAlmería <https://t.co/sU0rzye8kE>". 15 Dec 2015, 19:52 UTC. Tweet

Guzman, Marina Albiol (MarinaAlbiol) "Cuando hablan de austeridad quieren decir recortes sociales y salariales mientras la oligarquía se enriquece." @MarinaAlbiol en Fuenlabrada". 14 Dec 2015, 19:42 UTC. Tweet

Unfairness

Garcia, Pablo (PabloGarcia_54). "La población de la UE es empobrecida mientras bancos siguen sostenidos con dinero público #Tabu26J <https://t.co/tdsBOyOMHw>". 15 Jun 2016, 08:03 UTC. Tweet

PODEMOS (ahorapodemus). ""Durante mucho años en europa hemos tenido que pagar una crisis con la que no teniamos nada que ver" @OwenJones84 #PodemosAsturies". 15 Dec 2015, 19:19 UTC. Tweet

Ineffectiveness

PODEMOS (ahorapodemus). ""Hasta el FMI y la OCDE han dicho que la austeridad no ha servido para salir de la recesión" @Pablo_Iglesias_ #PabloIglesiasEnLaSER". 21 Jun 2016, 07:29 UTC. Tweet

PODEMOS (ahorapodemus). ""No era verdad que con las políticas de austeridad el país salía adelante, es al revés" @ierrejon #Somriu26J <https://t.co/7v7CdFvLmu>". 11 Jun 2016, 11:42 UTC. Tweet

Inequality

PODEMOS (ahorapodemus). ""Es curioso que la austeridad no suponga quitar privilegios sino recortar en sanidad y educación" @rosamariaartal #MujeresCambiandoPaís26J". 21 Jun 2016, 17:16 UTC. Tweet

Miguel Urbán Crespo (MiguelUrban). "La austeridad lo único que ha conseguido es aumentar la desigualdad" @MiguelUrban <https://t.co/KI82GRsN2I>". 12 Jun 2016, 19:09 UTC. Tweet

Market-oriented character

Alexandra (aKollontai). "O proxecto europeo ten máis de Tratado de libre comercio que de proxecto político ao servizo da xente <https://t.co/zx5VLbZZsL>". 11 Jun 2016, 19:38 UTC. Tweet

Lopez Paloma (palomalopezB). "La máxima de la UE es la liberalización feroz, no importan los trabajadores @palomalopezB #UnidasPodemos <https://t.co/VjE4W20hC4>". 17 Jun 2016, 15:43 UTC. Tweet

If in most of the tweets the subject suffering from EU's lack of solidarity is, explicitly or implicitly, "the people", there are two additional entities with whom European institutions and their leaders have not shown solidarity: Southern European countries and refugees. With regard to the former, the core-periphery conflict is here explicitly addressed, and the EU is accused of acting in the exclusive interest of the "core" – identified with Germany, in particular – to the detriment of Southern European countries, and especially Greece:

Core-periphery

Tania González Peñas (TaniaGonzalezPs). "Con la austeridad se está contruyendo Europa a 2 velocidades: la de bienestar y la de la periferia pobre" @TaniaGonzalezPs #ContigoEnAvilés". 12 Dec 2015, 12:50 UTC. Tweet

Irene Montero (Irene_Montero_). "Tenemos la voluntad de negociar con Europa y dejar de ser una colonia de Alemania. Europa puede también cambiar #objetivolglesias26J". 19 Jun 2016, 20:15 UTC. Tweet

Greece

JA Pérez Tapias (japtapias). "Alguien piensa de verdad que @PSOE gana votos arremetiendo contra Syriza y Tsipras, cuando Grecia fue vilmente extorsionada por la Troika?". 08 Dec 2015, 22:20 UTC. Tweet

Miguel Urbán Crespo (MiguelUrban). "Dos elementos han roto el acuerdo europeo: la crisis de los refugiados y el chantaje a Grecia" @MiguelUrban <https://t.co/XnYo3wlqR6>". 10 Dec 2015, 12:03 UTC. Tweet

Finally, Europe is accused of not showing enough solidarity with refugees, who are disgracefully left at its doors. The two parties strongly stand against the current management of the refugee crisis, thus extending the call for "more solidarity" not only with European citizens, but also with regard to people in need from all over the world:

PODEMOS (ahorapodemoss). "No reconocemos esta Europa que mira a otro lado cuando personas mueren en el Mediterráneo" @pbustinduy #AIMediterrani". 17 Jun 2016, 17:50 UTC.

Tweet

Unida, Izquierda (iunida). ""Una pandilla de burócratas en Europa deja morir personas en el Mediterráneo por ser pobres" @agarzon #GetafeGarzonea". 14 Jun 2016, 18:06 UTC. Tweet

Taking sovereignty back

Once the different charges against the EU have been identified, the discourse of “taking sovereignty back” also becomes clearer:

PODEMOS (ahorapodemos). "Es fundamental una Europa de derechos y soberanía #Objetivolglesias26J <https://t.co/sfZEftjpyO>". 19 Jun 2016, 20:34 UTC. Tweet

As with the anti-solidarity claim, the concept of “sovereignty” is also used with different meanings: sovereignty shall in fact be taken back not only from EU institutions, which are illegitimately limiting the power of “democratically elected national governments”, but from *any* power acting against the interests of “the people”, such as banks, multinationals and political elites at any political level:

PODEMOS (ahorapodemos). ""No reconocemos esta Europa donde poderes no elegidos violentan la soberanía" @pbustinduy #AIMediterrani <https://t.co/MW5wJ2W8hS>". 17 Jun 2016, 17:51 UTC. Tweet

Unida, Izquierda (iunida). "Necesitamos un gobierno rebelde y valiente que diga “NO” a los recortes que exige Bruselas #debate13J #13JdebateL6 #13JdebateA3". 13 Jun 2016, 20:57 UTC. Tweet

Popular, Unidad (UnidadPopular__). ""Vamos a tener un Gobierno que se va a plantar ante Juncker y Merkel" @Caninator #UnidasPodemos <https://t.co/feGR801rW1>". 16 Jun 2016, 18:55 UTC. Tweet

Benito, Xabier (xabierbenito). ""A juncker le diremos que no queremos vivir en un país donde la economía ahoge a la gente" @xabierbenito #DemocraciaInternacional". 19 Jun 2016, 11:16 UTC. Tweet

Monereo, M. (ManoloMonereo). "El TTIP implica sacrificar nuestra soberanía y perder derechos laborales, sociales y ambientales. <https://t.co/abxwxRQzam> [@CORDOBA_diario]". 14 Jun 2016, 10:54 UTC. Tweet

Bustinduy, Pablo (pbustinduy). ""El TTIP es un golpe de Estado contra la soberanía popular" @pbustinduy #ContigoEnMalaga <https://t.co/S3atIokl0g>". 16 Dec 2015, 20:45 UTC. Tweet

Unida, Izquierda (iunida). ""Tiene miedo que desde España empecemos a construir una Europa de los pueblo y no de las élites" @abrazopartio #VallekasGarzonea". 18 Jun 2016, 10:35 UTC. Tweet

Pro-European eurosceptics?

As discussed in the previous paragraphs, the criticisms advanced in the tweets of Podemos and Unidad Popular are severe and not trivial. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to depict the two parties as hard eurosceptics. As much as they criticize the current state of the EU, in fact, they never express any preference in favour of an Espexit but always call for a *different* project for the EU: ultimately, a more democratic and people-oriented European Union, in line with its own founding principles.

Iglesias, Pablo (Pablo_Iglesias_). "Día triste para Europa. Debemos cambiar de rumbo. De una Europa justa y solidaria nadie querría irse. Tenemos que cambiar Europa". 24 Jun 2016, 06:46 UTC. Tweet

Bustinduy, Pablo (pbustinduy). "Hay que refundar el proyecto de progreso que soñaron tantos europeos: nadie se iría de una Europa democrática, social y solidaria #brexit". 24 Jun 2016, 07:41 UTC. Tweet

PODEMOS (ahorapodemus). "'Quiero reforzar Europa políticamente con instituciones democráticas' @Pablo_Iglesias_ #PIglesiasPresidente20D <https://t.co/no095sHGXF>". 16 Dec 2015, 20:32 UTC. Tweet

In all their complexity, the criticisms emerging from Podemos' and IU's tweets can easily be attributable to our lines of conflicts. As has clearly emerged from the previous sections, the parties in fact strongly position themselves in favour of market-correcting policies both at the national and at the European levels, and strongly emphasize the existence of unfair core-periphery dynamics that favour the German core against Southern European countries. At the same time, in line with our expectations and with the results of the REScEU survey presented in Chapter 2, intra-EU mobility does not appear as a critical issue either for Podemos or Unidad Popular. Not only is the legitimacy of opening the Spanish labour market and social benefits to European citizens not challenged, but also "free movement" is invoked in reference to the management of the refugee crisis. Finally, the positioning of the two parties along the integration-autonomy line of conflict is more controversial: if a general call for "getting sovereignty back" is a distinctive trait of their online discourse, such a general claim does not translate

automatically into a desire for *less* Europe, but rather in a need for a *different* European Union.

In this Chapter we have presented the results of our analyses with regard to the Spanish political elite. Summing up, with regard to the overall politicization of EU-related issues in the political campaign(s) carried out by the Spanish political elite, results show that EU-related issues were highly *contentious* amongst the Spanish leadership, but *only partially salient*. The low saliency appears somehow surprising: if such a result is in line with the Spanish tradition of consensual support of European integration, its interpretation is more controversial in the present context. To address such a finding, we have contextualized the Spanish result in a comparative framework and hypothesized possible explanations, which should be further investigated by future research.

Moving to specific parties and to their – ideological or strategic – positions with regard to the EU, the hypotheses H3.a and H3.b proved to be confirmed as well in the Spanish case: parties with extreme ideological stances (Unidad Popular and Podemos in 2015, and the coalition Unidos Podemos in 2016) are more likely both to make use of tweets associated with the EU dimension of political competition (H3.a) and to make more use of tweets that criticize the EU (H3.b). With regards to moderate parties, considering the nature of the issues in question – which were expected (and confirmed) to be mainly related to the market-making vs. market-making line of conflict - we expected that PSOE would have been more likely to politicize EU-related issues compared with other moderate parties on the centre-right (PP, Ciudadanos). Interestingly, our expectation proved to be true in 2015 – when PSOE's candidates discussed EU-related issues (H3.c) and sent tweets which were critical towards the EU (H3.d) significantly more than those of PP and Ciudadanos – but not as much in 2016, when the party behaviour became more in line with that of its centre-right competitors. As we discussed in Chapter 4, our argument is that the occurrence of Brexit in concurrence with the 2016 electoral campaign affected the political climate, making it strategically more convenient for PSOE to emphasize its distance from Podemos than to chase it on criticizing the EU: a more in-depth analysis of the

overall climate of opinion is presented in this chapter.

Finally, in section 4.3 we have identified the main issues associated with criticism towards European integration by Spanish parties – especially Podemos and Unidad Popular / Unidos Podemos. In line with our theoretical framework and with our expectations (H2.a), these can be ultimately led back to our 1st (market-making vs. market correcting), 2nd (integration-autonomy) and 4th (core-periphery) lines of conflict, while the conflict between free movement and national closure did not play a significant role in the Spanish debate on European integration, in line with our expectation (H2.b) and with the survey data presented in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER V. Politicizing Europe: Insights From The Spanish Public(s)

Having presented in Chapter 4 the results of our analyses with regard to the Spanish political elite, in this chapter we finally discuss our findings with regard to the Spanish public(s). In line with the previous chapter, we start by presenting data on the salience and contentiousness of EU-related issues, and then focus on critical citizens with the aim of estimating their socio-political background and identifying their main arguments against the current state of European integration.

5.1. Politicizing Europe? Salience and contentiousness of EU-related issues amongst the Spanish public(s)

As we showed in the previous chapter, the salience of EU-related issues not only amongst the Spanish political elite but also amongst the “general public” is considered as a necessary condition for politicization to occur (see Kriesi and Grande 2014 amongst others). As outlined by Statham and Trezn (2015 p. 288), in fact, the new polarization of opinions and interests that characterizes the contemporary European Union is first and foremost driven by the increasing and diffuse awareness of European citizens that the ‘EU matters’, which at the same time leads to increasing claims by the public that address policy formulation. The authors go further, suggesting that, as politicization entails both “an increased level of resistance against the EU and its policies” and “an increased utilization of these political institutions by societal groups to achieve desired goals” (ibid., p. 292), EU politicization and democratization are thus interlinked “in a way that public contestations pose a challenge to executive decision making, raise democratic standards and trigger processes of public opinion and will formation” (ibid., p. 303; see Chapter 1 of this thesis for a more exhaustive discussion of EU politicization).

As presented in Chapter 3 and remarked upon in the previous chapter, to

account for the third dimension of politicization – “expansion to the public” – we have measured the level of salience and contentiousness of EU-related issues not only in the tweets sent by the Spanish political elite, but also in the tweets sent by Spanish citizens to their political candidates and representatives in the form of retweets and replies.⁶⁶

5.1.1. Salience

To test the second part of our H.1 (“We expect EU-related issues to be salient amongst [...] tweets sent by the Spanish general public”) we have proceeded to the identification of tweets discussing European integration and sent by Spanish citizens, and measured their relative salience. In order to identify EU-related tweets, we adopted the same methodology already presented in Chapter 4 with regard to the Spanish political elite. We first identified all tweets including a selected list of EU-related terms, and then classified all tweets matching at least one of the keywords present in our dictionary through an *ad hoc* built NLP algorithm (“relevancy classifier”) trained to distinguish EU-related issues from the overall sample of tweets containing EU-related keywords. Reliability scores for the two employed relevancy classifiers (2015; 2016) are presented in Table. 5.1.

Category	Precision	Recall	F-Score	Accuracy
December EU-relevant (citizens)	0.837	0.828	0.832	0.835
June EU-relevant (citizens)	0.818	0.956	0.882	0.807

Tab. 5.1 Reliability scores: Spanish public(s), EU-relevant tweets, 2015 and 2016.

As for the Spanish political elite, salience is here measured as the percentage of EU-related tweets (“relevant”) out of the total amount of tweets sent by the Spanish public to its leaders. Results are presented in Table 5.2.

⁶⁶ It is important to reiterate that possible biases due to the socio-demographic characteristics of Twitter users should be taken into account when generalizing our results to the overall Spanish population.

From	Matching EU keywords (N)		Relevant (N)		Relevant (% N tweets sent)	
	2015	2016	2015	2016	2015	2016
Public(s)	39,554	91,250	22,674	79,927	0.85	4.32

Tab. 5.2. Salience of EU-related tweets: Spanish public(s)

Interestingly enough, results for citizens closely recall those for their political leaders. Also in the case of the Spanish public, during the 2015 electoral campaign there was little debate over the issue of European integration –with EU-related tweets representing only 0.65% of the tweets sent by the Spanish political elite and 0.85% of those sent by the public - while in the 2016 elections this percentage is much larger, equalling 3.03% amongst the Spanish political elite and 4.32% for the Spanish citizens.

Nevertheless, if we look at the distribution over time of the EU-related tweets sent by Spanish citizens during the 2016 electoral campaign we can see how the same non-linear trend that already emerged with regard to the Spanish elite reappears: tweets dealing with European integration are of a low salience along most of the electoral campaign, but they “peak” in correspondence with the announcement of Brexit (24 June), as we can see in Figure 5.1.

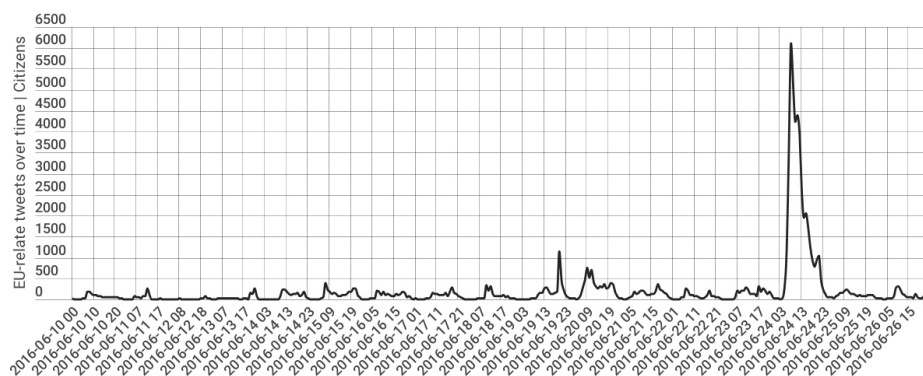


Fig. 5.1. EU-related tweets sent by Spanish citizens over time – 10-26 June 2016.

If the brevity and intensity of the peak was already acknowledged with regard to the Spanish political elite, it becomes even more blatant when looking at the tweets sent by the public. As we can see from Figure 5.1, the increase in the

salience of EU-related tweets occurs on 24 June only, while there is no trace of a “Brexit effect” in the days before or after the announcement of the referendum result: from 23 June to 24 June the number of EU-related tweets increases by 1,218%, to then decreases again moving from 24 June to 25 June. The intensity of the peak is as great: on the 24th the number of EU-related tweets sent was to 42,978, against an average of 2,309 tweets per day during the remainder of the electoral campaign. Also with regard to Spanish citizens, the increased salience of EU-related issues in 2016 appears thus not as a consequence of a likewise increased attention dedicated to European integration in the 2016 electoral campaign: if we calculate the percentage of EU-related tweets excluding 24 June, the proportion of tweets related to the EU during the 2016 campaign decreases significantly, from 4.32% to 2.23%. On the other hand, the opposite is true on Brexit day, when the percentage of EU-related tweets out of the total amount of tweets sent by Spanish citizens adds up to 22.35%.

Ultimately, considering together our citizens’ and political elite’s results we can draw three conclusions with regard to the salience of EU-related issues. First, EU-related issues were of a limited salience in the 2015 electoral campaign while, albeit not crucial, their importance significantly expanded in the 2016 electoral campaign. Second, external shocks such as the announcement of Brexit proved to deeply affect the extent to which issues related to European integration were debated on Twitter. Although this might not be surprising, the brevity and intensity of the peaks generated by this type of external event is blatant, and should be taken into account by social media researchers: potentially, a campaign characterized by a moderate number of EU-related tweets sent each day and one characterized by a very low number of tweets during most of the days and an intense peak at a specific moment can in fact result, overall, in equal percentages of EU-related tweets, but the two scenarios would substantively be very different. Given this, the possibility of monitoring real-time online conversations could open up new avenues not only to estimate the level of salience of EU-related issues, but also to understand the mechanisms behind its increases and decreases. Third, in both electoral campaigns the emphasis (or lack of) on EU-related issues from

Spanish citizens and their representatives has been very similar. Assuming that issue saliency is a key component of political competition (see Schmitt & Thomassen, 2000 amongst many others), the correspondence between the issues debated by politicians and the public's issue preferences is regarded as an important aspect of democratic responsiveness. In particular, Hobolt and Klemmensen (2008) have distinguished between rhetorical responsiveness – that is, the extent to which a government's selective policy emphasis in speeches reflects public issue preferences – and effective responsiveness – the correspondence between public issue preferences and budgetary priorities. Rhetorical responsiveness further includes two dimensions: political congruence – the extent to which there is a *correspondence* between politicians' attention to different issues and voters' attention of the same set of issues – and political responsiveness – whether political elites respond to changes in citizens' attention to different issues by increasing their allocation of time to those issues (Eulau & Karps 1977; Shor 2014). Although we do not have information about the extent to which citizens' preferences translate into actual policy, rhetorical responsiveness is often considered as a necessary but not sufficient condition for effective responsiveness, since policy actions in an issue area cannot be taken unless political representatives direct their attention to that issue (Jones & Baumgartner, 2004; see also Barberà & Bølstad, 2015). Our results point to a high level of *political congruence* between the Spanish political elite and Spanish citizens with regard to European integration: a finding which gives rise to hope with regard to the translation into effective responsiveness, thus truly interlinking EU politicization and democratization.

5.1.2. Contentiousness

Let us now move to the second dimension of politicization: contentiousness. As we did for the Spanish leadership, we here present our results with regard to the contentiousness of EU-related issues amongst the Spanish public(s), measured once again as the proportion of tweets critical

towards the EU versus the proportion of tweets which are not critical (either neutral or positive): the closer the shares, the higher the contentiousness. Also in this case, we created an algorithm to identify critical tweets⁶⁷ from our sample of EU-related tweets. Reliability scores for the two employed classifiers are presented in Table 5.3.

Category	Precision	Recall	F-Score	Accuracy
December EU-critical (public)	0.765	0.813	0.788	0.767
June EU-critical (public)	0.747	0.756	0.752	0.805

Tab. 5.3 Reliability scores: Spanish public(s), critical tweets vs. the EU, 2015 and 2016.

Table 5.4 presents the percentage of critical tweets of the total amount of EU-related tweets, in the 2015 and 2016 elections respectively.

From	Critical tweets (N)		Critical tweets (% N EU-related tweets)	
	2015	2016	2015	2016
Public(s)	12,716	40,691	56.08	50.91

Tab. 5.4. Negativity of EU-related tweets: citizens

As we can see from Table 5.4, the percentage of tweets critical of European integration is equal to 56.08% in 2015, while it decreases a little in the 2016 elections (50.91%). Interestingly, while in the 2015 elections the percentages of critical tweets are similar between leaders (59.41%) and citizens (56.08%), in the 2016 elections the difference is slightly higher: while positive and neutral tweets prevail for politicians (60.2%), in the 2016 elections half of citizens' tweets discussing EU-related issues were critical towards the current state of the EU.

⁶⁷ As outlined in Chapter 4, the category of critical tweets includes both tweets manifesting a principled opposition to the EU and European integration, either calling for Spain's withdrawal from membership or expressing policy preferences opposed to the whole project of European integration as it is currently conceived, and tweets expressing a qualified opposition to the EU, either opposing the Union's current or future planned trajectory or manifesting the author's concerns in relation to one or more policy areas.

Parallel to our approach for the Spanish political elite, we can start from our percentages of critical tweets to calculate a *Contentiousness index*⁶⁸ for the two elections, varying from 0 (maximum agreement) to 1 (maximum contentiousness). Contentiousness scores are presented in Table 5.5. As we can see from the table, amongst the Spanish public(s) the level of contentiousness of EU-related issues is extremely high in both elections – scoring 0.88 and 0.91 respectively in a 0-1 scale.

Year	Critical tweets (%)	Absolute distance	Contentiousness Index
December 2015	56,08	43,92	0,88
June 2016	50,91	49,09	0,91

Tab. 5.5. Contentiousness of EU-related issues: Spanish public(s). (0=maximum agreement; 1=maximum contentiousness)

EU-related issues thus proved to be extremely contentiousness in both elections, and this not only amongst the tweets sent by the political elite but also by Spanish citizens, thus challenging a view of Spain as a country characterized by an homogeneous consensus regarding the current state of the EU. Nevertheless, before drawing, in the next chapter, our conclusions on the extent to which EU-related issues have ultimately been politicized in the last two rounds of Spanish elections, in the following sections we wish to deepen our understanding of the type of criticism moved by Spanish citizens.

With regard to the Spanish political elite, in Chapter 4 we have seen how criticism of the EU was mainly raised by candidates and representatives from

⁶⁸ As our axis of contentiousness moves from a minimum of 0 (maximum agreement, with 100% of tweets being either critical or not critical) to a maximum of 50 (maximum disagreement, with 50% of tweets being critical and 50% not critical), we can measure the level of contentiousness in terms of absolute distance from the value zero, with 50 representing the maximum possible level of contentiousness. In our case, this distance equals 43.92 in December 2015, and 49.09 in June 2016. For the purpose of clarity, we can normalize these values in a contentiousness index ranging from 0 to 1, with 0 being the maximum agreement and 1 being the maximum contentiousness. As you can see from Table 5.5, the citizens' contentiousness index equals 0.88 in December 2015 and 0.91 in June 2016.

Podemos and Unidad Popular, and to a more limited extent by PSOE's representatives. Also, by looking at the content of critical tweets we were able to identify the main lines of conflict along which debate over European integration polarizes, and see how the leftist political elite mainly challenges the present pro-market and "pro-core" character of the EU, whilst favoring a market-correcting approach displaying more solidarity with peripheral countries from Southern Europe. To complete our picture, we have investigated the same aspects with regard to the Spanish public: to which parties and politicians are critical citizens ideologically "closer"? Are citizens and elites advancing the same criticisms, or does the public raise somehow different critical issues? To answer these questions, in section 5.2 we use network analysis to understand the interactional structure of "critical citizens" and attempt to identify their "closer" actors. We further deepen our investigation of critical citizens' political partisanship by presenting additional insights on Spanish supporters of leaving the EU that emerged from the 2016 REScEU survey. Finally, in section 5.3 we trace the main reasons behind citizens' criticism to the EU, and their eventual overlap with our lines of conflict.

5.2. Contextualizing critical citizens: a network analysis

5.2.1. Inferring political partisanship from Twitter data

In recent years, several works have attempted to use social media data in order to detect users' political partisanship (Barberà, 2015; Conover et al., 2011a; Conover et al., 2011b; Makazhanov et al., 2014 amongst others). The methods adopted to detect users' partisanship can be broadly distinguished into two categories: those that employ a content-driven approach, first identifying a set of relevant tweets and secondly extracting their actual sentiment; and those that adopt an interaction-driven approach, employing network analysis to study sentiments expressed implicitly in the form of preferential following and re-tweeting. We have opted for an interaction-driven approach for two reasons. First,

considering that the sample of tweets we are interested in is that focusing on EU-related issues only, applying further algorithms in order to identify the sub-set of tweets expressing preferences for a specific party would risk shrinking our sample excessively; second, if content-driven approaches have often been fruitful in two-party systems such as the US, their application is more trivial in multi-party system such as the present Spanish environment.

With regard to interaction-driven approaches, on Twitter we can distinguish between two overlapping and interdependent networks (Bruns & Burgess, 2012; on this topic see also Airoidi, Barisione & Michailidou, forthcoming). One is based on the relatively stable follower-followee relationship (Barberà, 2015; Golbeck & Hansen, 2011 amongst others), and another based on the short-term and emergent communicative interactions surrounding topics and hashtags (Conover et al., 2011a; Conover et al., 2011b; Makazhanov et al., 2014 amongst others). Both methods are considered as valid and are widely employed in the literature. Considering our data collection strategy, we have opted for this second, more transient type of Twitter network.

As we saw in Chapter 3, there are two primary modes of public user-user interaction: “retweets” and “mentions”. In their pioneering works on the use of network analysis to detect political partisanship on Twitter, Conover et al. (2011a; 2011b) have demonstrated that, while mentions are often used to interact with ideologically-opposed individuals and can thus be critical or explicitly negative, retweets are much more consistent indicators of support for a tweet’s account and content, thus exhibiting a segregated partisan structure with extremely limited connectivity between users with diverging political views (Conover et al., 2011a; Conover et al. 2011b). For this reason, as outlined in Chapter 3 we have attempted to detect “critical citizens” partisanship on the basis of their retweet network, in which users are connected if one has rebroadcasted content produced by another.

Network analysis is now a widely popular approach in the field of online research, in particular in the study of Twitter (see Bruns & Burgess, 2012; Calvo et al., 2016). Due to the “natively” networked character of Twitter, in fact, mapping

online conversation networks can provide important insights into a public discussion over a societal or political issue: in our case, debates over European integration. In particular, by visualizing a “network map” of the online interactions around a specific topic, patterns of opinion homogeneity vs. polarization may emerge. As outlined by Airoidi, Barisione and Michailidou (forthcoming):

A polarized-crowd structure is a typical indicator of *ideological sorting* in online communication (Barberá, 2014; Colleoni et al., 2014), with discussion networks split in two [or more] groups of politically like-minded individuals driven by mechanisms of attitude homophily and/or selective exposure to consonant sources of information. Mapping the relationships among those who tweet about a certain issue allows the identification of users who are part of highly connected subnetworks or clusters (Himmelboim et al. 2013).

In our case, we use network analysis to examine the interactional structure of those citizens who criticize the current state of European integration (“critical citizens”), in order to see if they result in the formation of relatively disconnected conversational communities. Our goal here is three-fold. First, we are genuinely interested in understanding the structure of our network of critical citizens, to see if and to what extent they are clustered into disconnected conversational communities (“clusters”, or “communities”). Second, we are interested in identifying the main influencers within each cluster. And third, we are interested in seeing if we can bring each community back to a specific Spanish political party, on the basis of the political (or societal) affiliation of each cluster’s main influencers. If this is the case – i.e., if users are clustered around specific political parties – we could thus see not only if and to what extent the different communities that emerge interact between themselves, but also understand the political “colour” of most critical citizens.

5.2.2. Insights from 2015 and 2016 retweet networks of “critical citizens”

The retweet networks of citizens critical of the current state of European

integration are visually illustrated in Figures 5.2 and 5.3, referring to the 2015 and 2016 Spanish general elections respectively. The different colours in the visualization correspond to different clusters in the network, that is, tight groups of users having frequently interacted together, identified through Gephi's community detection algorithm, a technique aimed at identifying sub-groups of nodes, known as "communities" or "clusters" (see Blondel et al., 2008). Labels highlight the main "influencers" within each cluster – that is, the authors of tweets that have been retweeted most often.

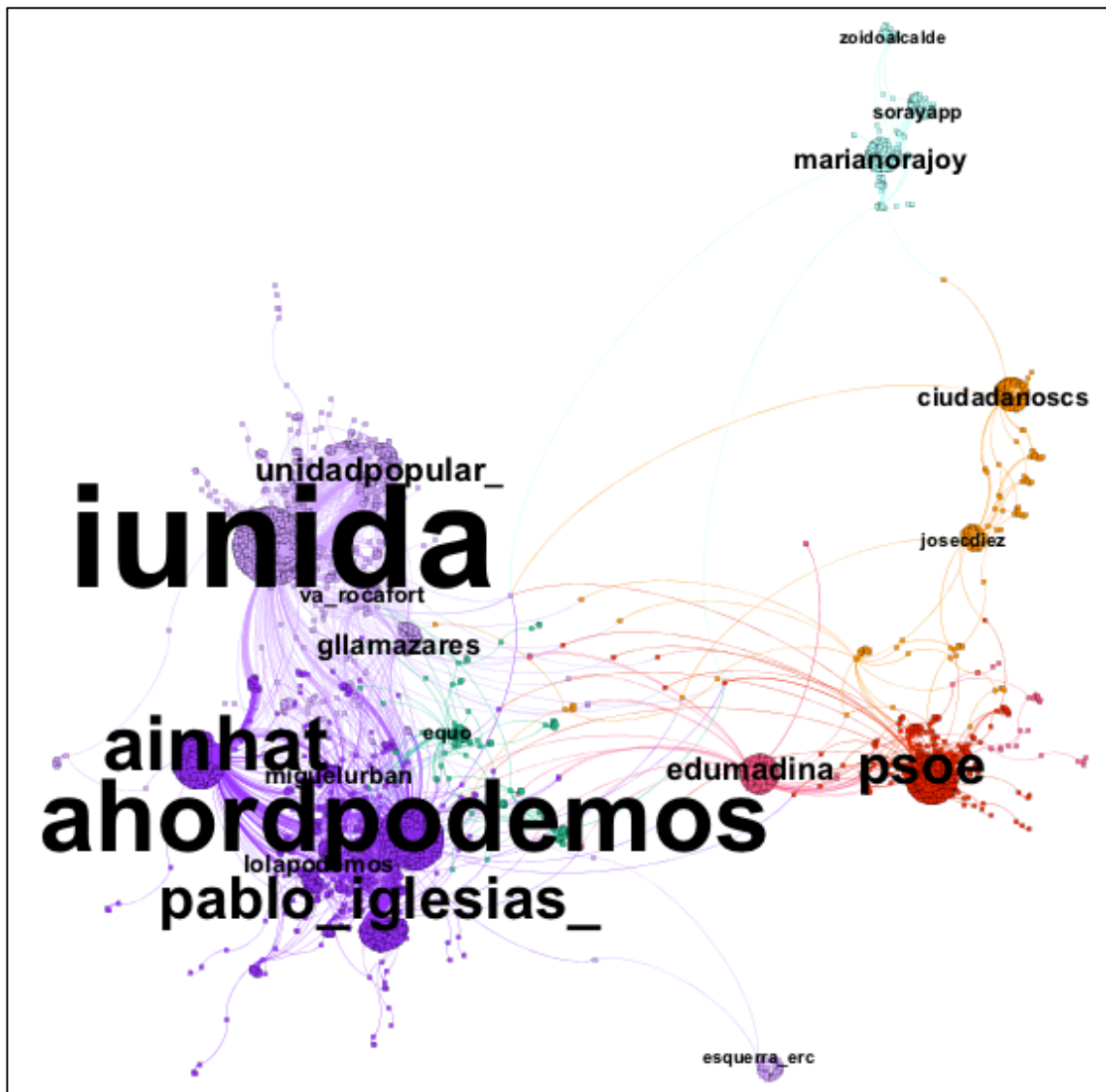


Fig. 5.2. 2015 critical citizens' retweet network. By the author, created using ForceAtlas2 layout in Gephi. Communities are detected through Gephi's modularity algorithm. Labels' sizes are proportional to the nodes' in-degrees.

Starting with our December dataset, in Figure 5.2 we can see how the overall network's structure appears highly polarized, with conversations clustered into disconnected conversational communities. Only two of the detected communities – those in light and dark violet – appear in fact as highly interconnected. On the other hand, the light blue community is the least interconnected, as its members interact exclusively within themselves, with few ties to users from other communities. With regard to our second goal – identifying the key actors within each community – we have employed the node's in-degree as a measure of users' influence, that is, the number of people (other Twitter users) who have retweeted their tweets. The labels of the main influencers within each community are represented in Figure 5.2; to account for their influence in the overall network, the labels' sizes are proportional to the node's in-degree. As we can see from the names in the figure, the detected communities – which “natively” emerged from the interactional structure, with no other *a priori* information about the users – clearly correspond to *partisan clusters*, with the main influencers within each cluster being politicians from different Spanish parties.

As we can from the figure, the two bigger communities, comprising together about 80% of the nodes of the network, are composed by Podemos' (dark violet) and Izquierda Unida's supporters (light violet), with the main influencers being the accounts of Podemos' (@ahorapodemos, @ainhat and @pablo_iglesias_) and IU's (@iunida, @unidadpopular) candidates and representatives. Interestingly, although the two parties ran separately in the 2015 campaign, their online communities are closer than any other community in the network. It is worth mentioning that EQUO⁶⁹'s supporters are identified by the algorithm as a separate community, although extremely interconnected with Podemos' one. The red cluster, third by size, is then composed of PSOE supporters: although disconnected, its members have a few ties with those from other communities, except for the light blue community which remains completely

⁶⁹ A political party founded in 2011 through the merging of 35 different Spanish green parties, which at the 2015 national elections joined the list of Podemos.

disconnected. Interestingly, around the account of PSOE's candidate @edumadina a smaller, separate community has been detected, with very strong ties with PSOE but also more ties with Izquierda Unida and Podemos than PSOE's average. A few ties with other communities – except for the light blue one – are present also for the orange cluster, composed of Ciudadanos supporters and significantly smaller than the ones just described. Finally, the aforementioned light blue community is composed of PP supporters, who are completely disconnected from the rest of the network – not interacting with members of other communities – and whose main influencers are @marianorajoy and PP's vicepresident @sorayapp.

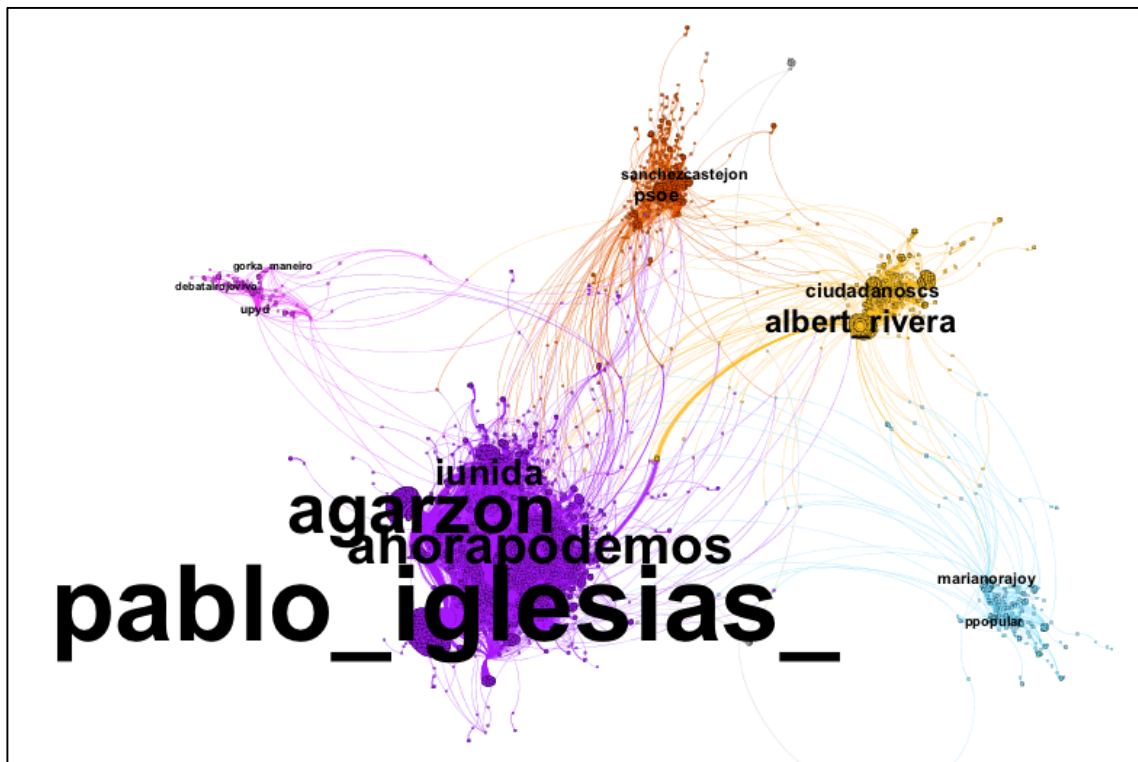


Fig. 5.3. 2016 critical citizens' retweet network. By the author, created using ForceAtlas2 layout in Gephi. Communities are detected through Gephi's modularity algorithm. Labels' sizes are proportional to the nodes' in-degrees.

Very similar results emerge when examining the 2016 network displayed in Figure 5.3. Also in this case, the communities that emerged through Gephi's modularity algorithm correspond to different Spanish parties. Once again, the

majority of nodes are part of the violet community, corresponding to Unidos Podemos supporters. Although Unidos Podemos was born as an electoral coalition formed by Unidad Popular and Podemos and did not have a unitary Twitter account, but rather campaigned using the two parties' accounts @iunida and @ahorapodemos, in contrast with 2015 the supporters of Unidad Popular and Podemos appear now to form a unique, big, highly interconnected cluster. This suggests that, at least with regard to the EU, the "closeness" of the two parties might go beyond electoral convenience.

In Chapter 4, extensively investigated from an elite perspective the relationship between parties' positioning on the left-right axis and their level of criticism towards the EU, measured both in terms of salience and contentiousness, confirming our expectation that parties at the extreme of the political spectrum – in the Spanish case, the leftist Podemos and Unidad Popular – would be the more likely to discuss EU-related issues and criticize the current state of the EU. In this section we have tested a similar hypothesis with regard to Spanish citizens, using network analysis in order to identify citizens' political partisanship, detecting the main "critical communities" and their main influencers. Through the visualization of the critical citizens' retweet network, we can see how critical citizens mainly belong to critical parties: both in the 2015 and in the 2016 elections, criticisms over European integration are raised first and foremost by supporters of Podemos and Izquierda Unida (Unidos Podemos in 2016), the communities of which compose in both years about the 80% of the overall network.⁷⁰

5.2.3. Spanish "leavers" and the lack of far-right parties: insights from the 2016 REScEU survey

Through the visualization of the 2015 and 2016 critical citizens' retweet

⁷⁰ According to the modularity algorithm, in the 2015 elections the communities of Podemos and Izquierda Unida included 40% and 34% of the nodes (users) respectively, while in 2016 the cluster of Unidos Podemos involved 75% of the citizens in the network.

networks we have been able to infer the political partisanship of Spanish critical citizens, demonstrating that they mainly belong to Podemos and Izquierda Unida. Interestingly, our result confirms the intuition, which already emerged in Chapter 4 with regard to the Spanish political elite, of a Spanish “exceptionality” with regard to criticism towards the EU. On the one hand, in contrast to what happens in most European countries, although the criticisms raised by IU and Podemos are severe no Spanish party expresses in favour of an “Espexit”. On the other hand, as already discussed in Chapter 2, in Spain no party represents an instance of the “populist radical right” (PRR) - i.e. rallying against immigration and multiculturalism, supporting welfare chauvinism and tending to be at odds with the process of European integration (see Mudde, 2007). At least in terms of political offer, criticism to the EU appears thus limited to the left extreme of the political spectrum.

With regard to the supply-side, in Chapter 2 discussed the main factors that, according to scholars, might have played a role in hampering the rise and success of right-wing populist parties in Spain. Three main demand-side factors have been identified in the literature (see Alonso & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2015 amongst others). First, there exists a cleavage structure characterised by an entrenched conflict between peripheral and state nationalisms, which makes it difficult for new parties from the right to play the “nativist” card. Second, the mainstream right-wing party (PP) has until now been able to obtain the support of far-right voters, leaving little space for the establishment of new far right political forces. And finally, the electoral system is highly disproportional, which discourages the rise of new parties regardless of their electoral agenda.

When analysing citizens’ tweets in this chapter, the visualization of the critical citizens’ retweet networks has allowed us to identify the political partisanship of Spanish critical citizens, confirming how critical citizens are indeed politically close to Podemos and IU. Nevertheless, as our data collection strategy is based on citizens’ interactions (in terms of retweets and replies) with *existing* Spanish parties, limiting our analysis to citizens’ tweets we could not exclude the existence of a potential group of right-wing citizens advancing the same ideas

raised by voters of PRR parties across Europe. To complete our picture, we have thus decided to deepen our understanding of the political placement of critical citizens by cross-validating our Twitter results with survey data. Is there a silent minority of hard eurosceptic critical citizens, desiring not only a modification of the status quo but also the end of Spain's EU membership? How does this possible minority of citizens locate itself along the political spectrum? Which party does it vote for?

To answer these questions, in Figure 5.4 we have represented the percentage of citizens who would vote “leave” in a referendum on their country's EU membership in six European countries (including Spain) according to the results of our 2016 REScEU survey.⁷¹

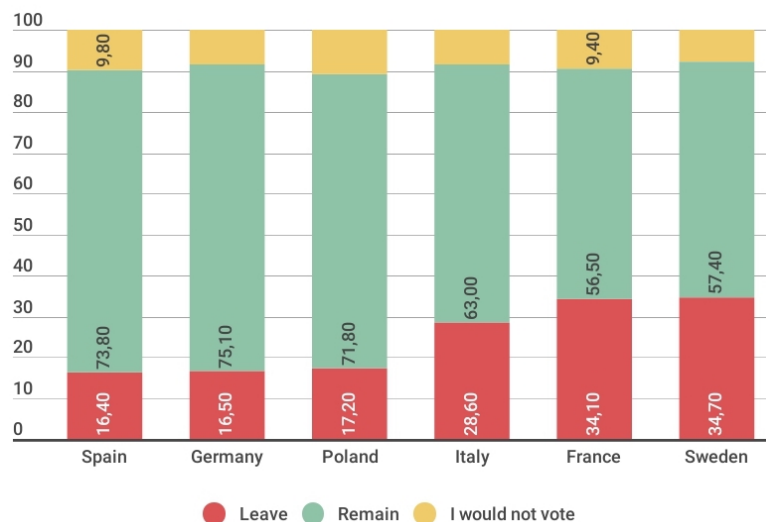


Fig. 5.4 Voting intention in a referendum on EU membership, country percentages

As we can see from Figure 5.4, compared to other European countries Spain is the country with the lowest percentage of citizens willing to exit the EU, together with Germany. Nevertheless, although relatively small – 16.40% of respondents - a niche of hard eurosceptic citizens do emerge from survey data. Considering that, in contrast with countries with higher percentages of “leavers” –

⁷¹ For detailed information on the REScEU survey see Ferrera, M. and Pellegata, A. (2017), *Can Economic and Social Europe Be Reconciled? Citizen Views on Integration and Solidarity*, report available at www.resceu.eu.

such as Italy, France and Sweden - in Spain no party is in favour of leaving the EU, it becomes interesting to understand how these citizens locate politically, and to compare the result with the other countries under examination.

Starting from the aggregate level, in Table 5.6 we can see how, overall, “leavers” locate themselves on the left-right axis. As according to the inverted-U curve hypothesis critical citizens are expected to be located at both extremes of the political spectrum, we have divided respondents into 5 categories on the basis of their self-placement on an eleven point left-right scale: extreme-left (0-2); centre-left (3-4); centre (5); centre-right (6-7), extreme-right (8-10). As we can see from the table, at least at the aggregate level extreme right-wing citizens appear as the ones more willing to leave the EU: 40.6% of citizens located at the extreme-right would in fact vote “leave” in a referendum on their country’s EU membership, against an average of 24.8%. Pearson χ^2 is also significant ($p < 0.001$) confirming that there is significant association between voting intention and political self-placement. Pearson χ^2 is also significant ($p < 0.001$) confirming that there is significant association between voting intention and political self-placement.

	Extreme-left	Centre-left	Centre	Centre-right	Extreme-right	Total
Remain	69.6	80.1	60.5	68.6	53.7	66.0
Leave	24.5	13.8	24.1	24.3	40.6	24.8
Not vote	5.9	6.1	15.4	7.1	5.7	9.2
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Tab. 5.6. Political collocation and voting behavior in the eventuality of a referendum on EU membership in Germany, Italy, France, Spain, Poland and Sweden (percentages). N = 7824.

To go further in our understanding of the relationship between left-right self-placement and likelihood to vote “leave” in a possible referendum on EU membership, for each of the six countries examined we have calculated the percentage of “leavers” amongst extreme-left, centre-left, centre, centre-right and extreme-right respondents. Results are displayed in Figure 5.7; Pearson χ^2 is significant in each country.

	Extreme-left	Centre-left	Centre	Centre-right	Extreme-right	Total
France	23.2	19.5	32.4	35.8	50.7	34.1
Germany	18	6.5	18.7	19.0	47.9	16.9
Italy	16.1	11.7	31.2	36.8	53.8	28.9
Poland	6.2	8.1	17.0	13.7	31.9	17.3
Sweden	39.3	27.4	36.4	33.5	37.9	34.9
Spain	30.5	15.4	11.7	9.8	14.5	16.5

Tab. 5.7. Percentage of “leavers” amongst respondents located at the extreme-left, centre-left, centre, centre-right and extreme-right of the political spectrum, by country. N = 1928.

Importantly, the results in Table 5.7 show that citizens located at the extreme-right are *by far* the most likely to vote “leave” in a referendum on their countries’ EU membership in France (extreme-right: 50.7%; total: 34.1%), Germany (extreme-right: 47.9%; total: 16.9%) Italy (extreme-right: 53.8%; total: 28.9%), and Poland (extreme-right: 31.9%; total: 17.3%). In Sweden the situation appears different: while the overall percentage of “leavers” is higher than in all other countries (34.9%), leavers distribute more heterogeneously along the political spectrum.

Nevertheless, the most interesting result is the one concerning Spain: differently from what happens in all other countries, in fact, the highest percentage of Spanish leavers locate themselves at the extreme-left of the political spectrum (extreme-left: 30.5%; total: 16.5%), while only a small percentage of extreme-right respondents would vote in favour of an “Espexit”. Going back to our initial question, it seems then that disincentives to the rise of PRR eurosceptic parties in Spain are not to be attributable to the supply-side only, but first and foremost to the demand-side: at least according to our survey data, the potential *niche* of far-right eurosceptic voters appears in fact rather small, with hard eurosceptic citizens being mostly concentrated on the extreme-left of the political spectrum.

To complete our analysis of Spanish critical citizens, in Figure 5.5 we represent the percentages of “remainers” and “leavers” by party, aggregating respondents on the basis of the party for whom they declared to have voted in the 2016 Spanish elections. As we can see from the figure, the correlation between

self-placement at the extreme-left and intention to vote “leave” in an eventual referendum on Spain’s EU membership is confirmed by respondents’ voting behaviours in the 2016 elections: while only a small percentage of PSOE (8.1%), PP (9%) and Ciudadanos (12.9%) voters would actually vote “leave”, almost 1 out of 3 of Unidos Podemos’ voters would actually favour an Espexit.

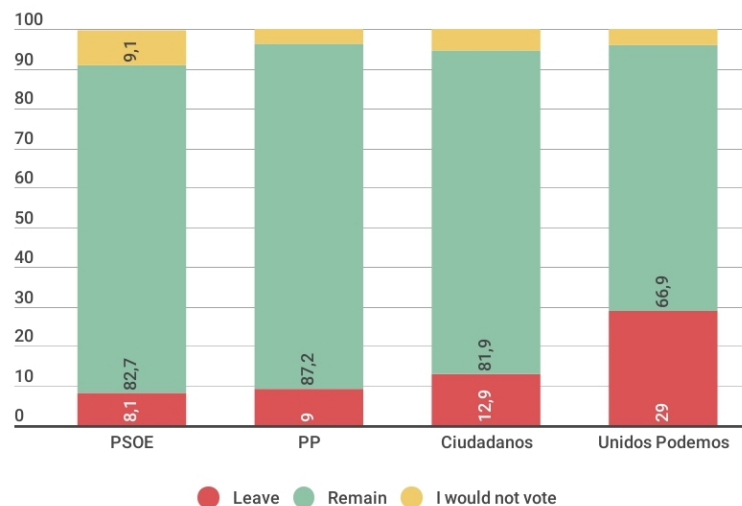


Fig. 5.4 Voting intention in a referendum on EU membership, by parties voted for in the 2016 Spanish elections

Ultimately, Spanish euroscepticism is confirmed to be an exception, at least if compared to the other five countries included in our survey: not only Spaniards are, overall, less likely to vote “leave” in a referendum on EU membership, but, differently from what happens in other countries, where leavers are mainly located at the extreme-right of the political spectrum, Spanish leavers belong to the extreme-left of the political spectrum. To answer our initial question, according to our results Spanish “hard eurosceptics” are thus not right-wing citizens constrained to vote PP by the lack of far-right eurosceptic parties, but rather represent an “extreme” fringe of Podemos’ voters.

5.3. Identifying critical issues: an assessment of our four lines of conflict

In this chapter we have presented our results with regards to the salience

and contentiousness of EU-related issues amongst the Spanish public. Subsequently, we have attempted to detect, using both Twitter and survey data, the political partisanship of “critical citizens”. In this section, we conclude our analysis of EU politicization amongst Spanish citizens by examining the content of “critical tweets”.

As the amount of critical tweets sent by the public is, in absolute numbers, extremely high - 12,716 tweets in 2015 and even 40,691 tweets in 2016 – to identify the EU-related issues most often associated with criticism towards European integration we have used the text of critical tweets to recreate a word-to-word co-occurrence network. Successfully used as an analysis technique since the early stages of content analysis (Osgood, 1959), word-to-word co-occurrence networks allow us to easily identify words with similar appearance patterns (connected by edges) and to further interpret the emerging co-occurrence structure.

5.3.1. The 2015 elections: opposing austerity and European economic elites

Starting with the 2015 elections, in Figure 5.4 we have reproduced the visualization of the word-to-word co-occurrence network calculated on the basis of the text of the 12,716 critical tweets sent by Spanish citizens (see figure on the next page).

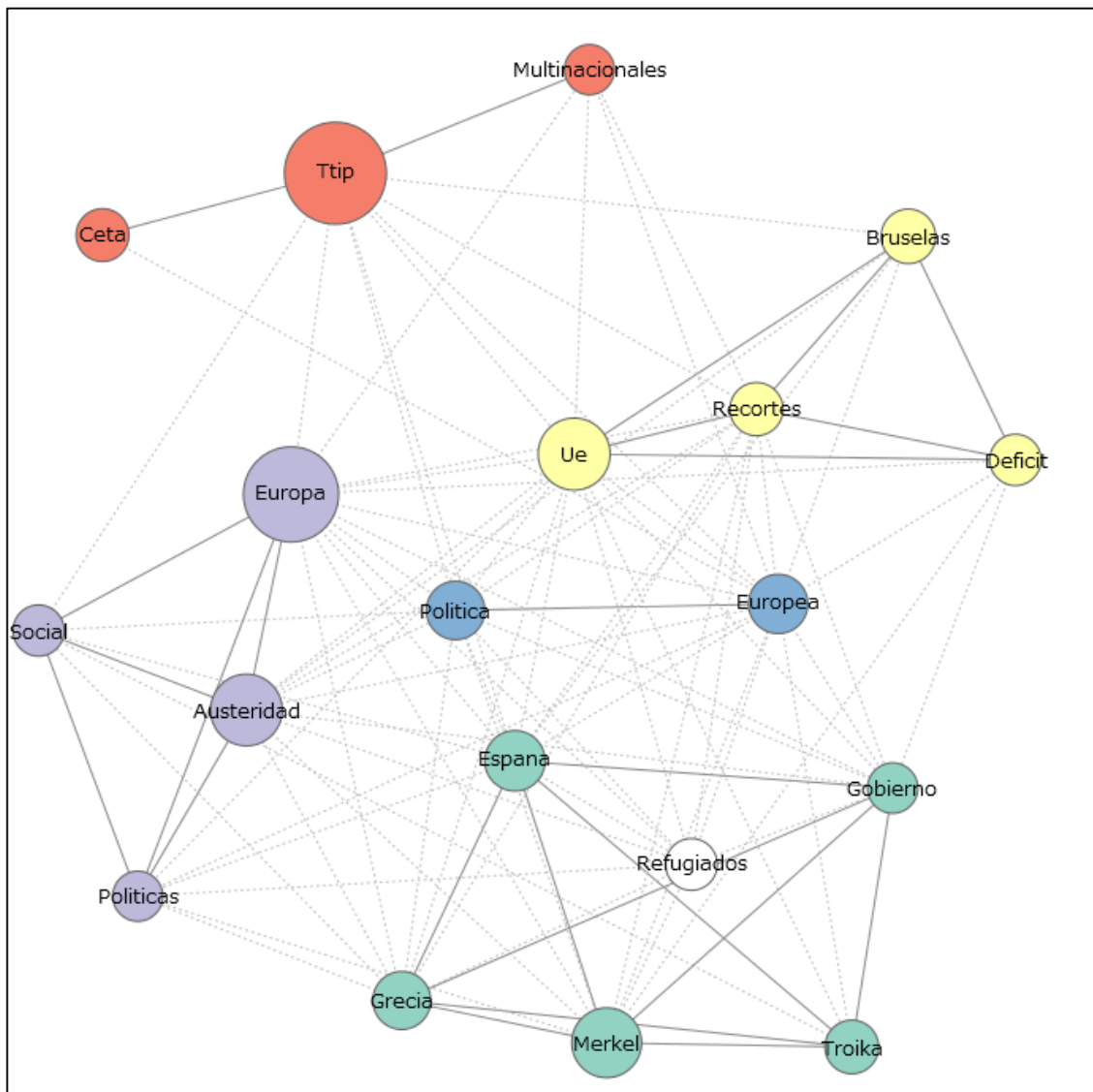


Fig. 5.4. 2015 Word-to-word co-occurrence network based on the text of citizens' tweets critical toward the current state of the EU.

In the figure, words with similar appearance patterns are displayed as connected by edges. In order to further emphasize the different clusters of co-occurring words, words have been coloured on the basis of a modularity algorithm. Such an intuitive visualization allows us to identify four main types of criticism towards the EU:

- a. *A broad anti-globalization discourse* against CETA, TTIP and multinational companies in general

El TTIP gran amenaza que se cierne sobre Europa.Y está negociándose en secreto!Coinciden @PericoArrojo y @ChesusYuste @chunta #DebateCerbuna

@PSOE Cuando se sirve al capital fitmando TTIP y cambiando el artículo 135 de la constitución demostráis vuestro capitalismo de amiguetes.

"El TTIP coloca la democracia en manos de las multinacionales" (Manuel Alonso) #GarzónEnGamonal

b. *An anti-austerity claim*, which is addressed both at the national - against cuts to public spending and fiscal compact ("Bruxelles", "EU", "Deficit", "cuts") - and at the European levels ("Europe", "austerity", "social", "policies")

"En la UE el PSOE vota de la mano del PP y a nadie se le olvida la reforma del artículo 135" @Pablo_Iglesias_ #HablaConPablo

Me llamó la atención que, en relación a la UE, solo aspiren a flexibilizar los objetivos de déficit y no a acabar con austeridad.

La cuenta atrás, también para una nueva Europa fiel a sus bases originarias y contra austericidio #togetherpodemos <https://t.co/cYoGPJweFu>

c. *An anti-elite position*, challenging both the national government ("Spain", "Government") and the 'technocratic elites' at the EU level ("Merkel", "Troika", "Greece")

@UPYD Y estar en contra de la UE no es ser antieuropeo, sino más bien defender la soberanía nacional frente a los burócratas de Bruselas.

"Esta ye la candidatura de la clase trabajadora, la q se enfrenta a la oligarquía y a la Troika" @faustinozapico #GarzónEnXixón

@marianorajoy y yo quiero que me gobierna el que yo elija,no Merkel,la Troika o Junker

d. *A negative judgment of the management of the refugee crisis* ("refugees"), articulated both at the national and the European levels, which although constituting a separate cluster is highly inter-connected with anti-elite positions.

Hay que abrir Europa a refugiados, inmigrantes y que cierre las puertas a Merkel y sus políticas @MarinaAlbiol #GarzónEnMadrid aplausos

"No queremos la hipocresía de la UE que llora por los refugiados que huyen de las guerras que ellos provocan" @agarzon #AlicanteConGarzón

Rajoy ha planteado una política europea contraria a los valores de los españoles en materia de refugiados @sanchezcastejon #CARAaCARA2015

Ultimately, all these issues can be traced back to our market-making vs. market-correcting line of conflict, with critical tweets favouring market-correcting economic positions and criticizing market-making tendencies at the EU level. At the same time, the issues that emerged are critically positioned on the peripheral side of our core-periphery conflict, as the main objects of criticism are the demands for fiscal retrenchment, the policy of austerity and the consequent social and political costs, in regard to which the EU is often accused for its (supposed) lack of solidarity:

"No queremos una Unión Europea que condena al Sur al exilio y la miseria" @monicaoltra #VotaPodemos20D <https://t.co/jimXapl996>

"Con la austeridad se está contruyendo Europa a 2 velocidades: la de bienestar y la de la periferia pobre" @TaniaGonzalezPs #ContigoEnAvilés

Hay que desmontar la mentira del TTIP, un tratado contra los pueblos del sur de Europa. #VotoNOalTTIP @ensanro <https://t.co/dNVe5soD2I>

@sanchezcastejon: Si el sur de Europa gira al socialismo podemos luchar mejor ante la Austeridad #PedroSánchezEnLaSER

5.3.2. The 2016 elections: differences and commonalities

As we have pointed out in these last two chapters, the occurrence of Brexit during the 2016 elections has deeply skewed the online discussions around the issue of European integration. If the main claims against the current EU governance that emerged in the 2015 debate – anti-austerity, anti-elites, anti-globalization - are still present in 2016, in 2016 they are placed side by side with a more general discourse on “the Europe that we want”, as we can see from the word-to-word co-occurrence network presented in Figure 5.5.

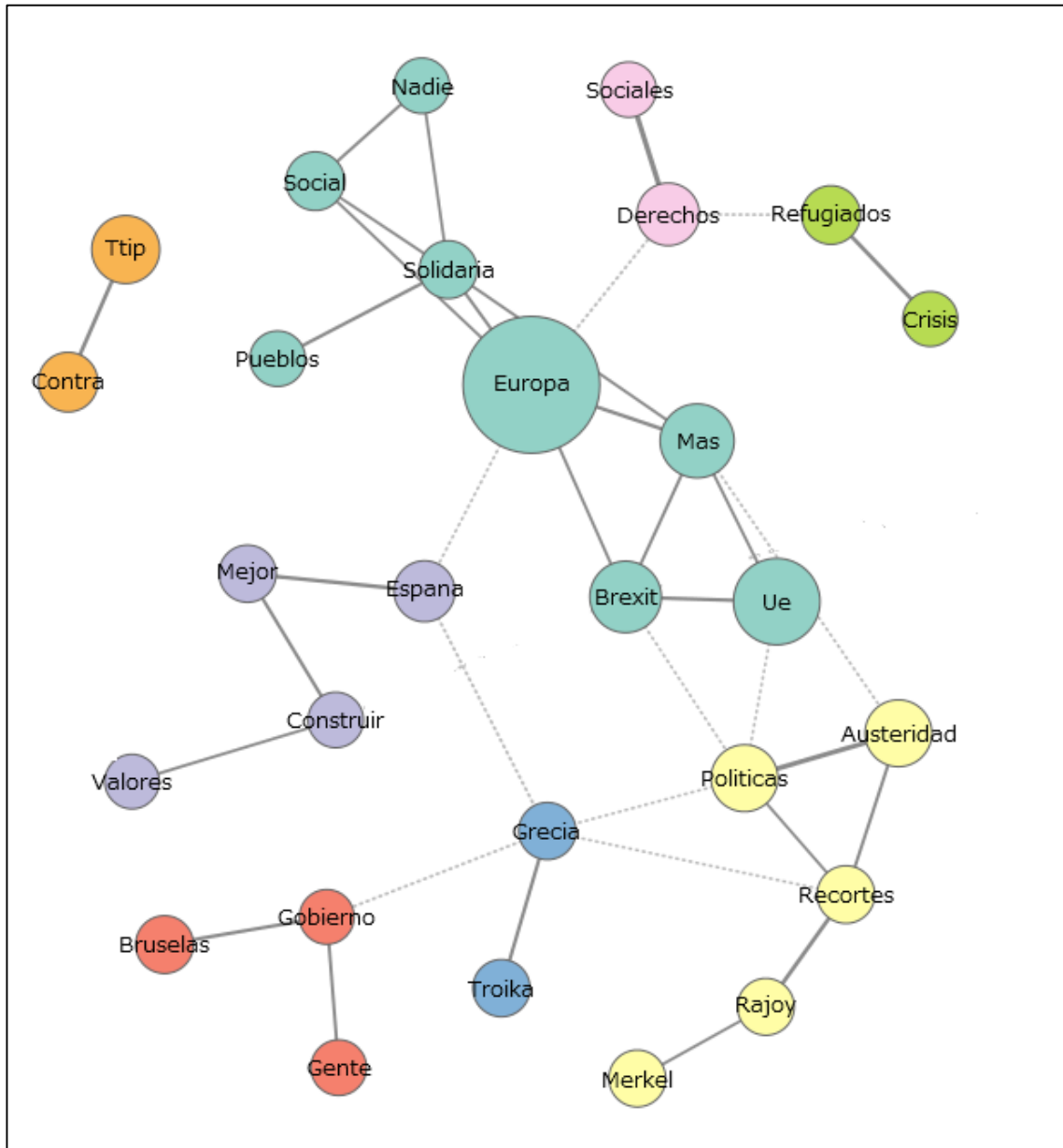


Fig. 5.5. 2016 Word-to-word co-occurrence network based on the text of citizens' tweets critical toward the current state of the EU.

To better account for differences and commonalities between the two elections, in Figure 5.6 we have further recreated a word-to-variable co-occurrence network, where the two variables are built by merging in two separate files the texts of all critical tweets sent by Spanish citizens during the 2015 and 2016 elections respectively. The output displayed in Figure 5.6 visually presents the results of our co-occurrence network: at the centre of the graph we can find a

list of words that were widely used to criticize the EU during both elections, while in the left and right areas we have plotted the words that were tweeted more than average during the 2015 (left-side of the graph) and 2016 (right-side of the graph) campaigns.

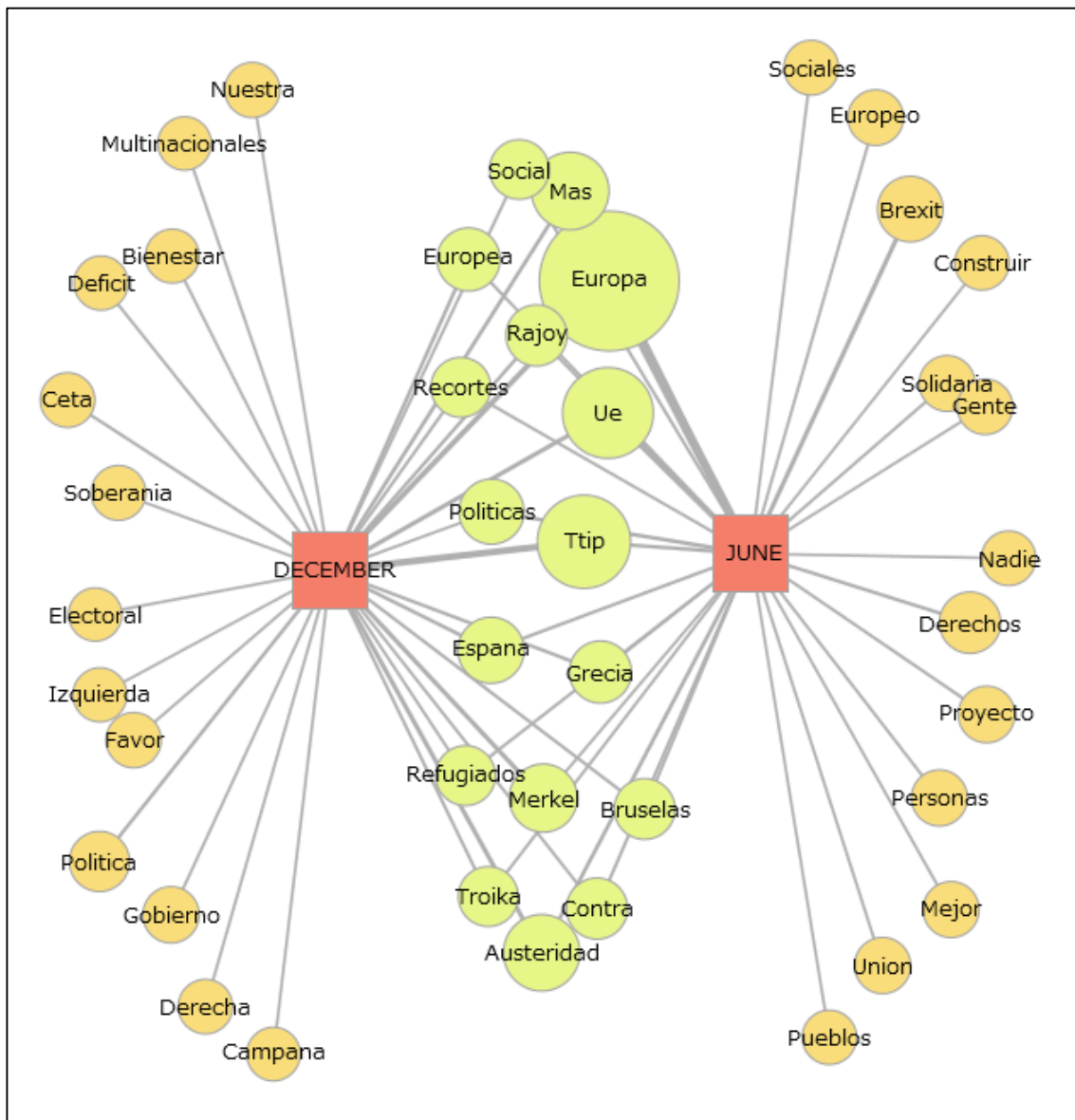


Fig. 5.6. Word-to-variable co-occurrence network based on the text of citizens' critical tweets toward the current state of the EU. The two variables are constituted by merging all critical tweets sent by Spanish citizens during the 2015 elections (variable "December") and 2016 elections (variable "June").

Starting with the commonalities, in the figure we can find trace of the same

anti-austerity stance that emerged from the 2015 debate (“austerity”, “policies”, “cuts”), addressed also in this case both at the national (“Rajoy”) and supranational (“Merkel”) levels:

Necesitamos un gobierno rebelde y valiente que diga “NO” a los recortes que exige Bruselas #debate13J #13JdebateL6 #13JdebateA3

Los recortes y la austeridad excluyen a la mayoría. Además de posible es imprescindible cambiar el rumbo y recuperar España y Europa #Brexít

Rajoy promete más recortes a Europa y oculta la carta a la ciudadanía. Que no quede nadie sin conocer esta infamia. <https://t.co/xN6oAGa7uD>

A second commonality between the two elections is the presence of an *anti-elite position*, which is here present in two separate lines of criticism: one standing with peripheral countries (“Greece”) against the Troika, and a second one standing for the people (*Gente*, in Spanish) against the unpopular decisions made by Brussels’ technocratic elites:

"Para no estar como Grecia hay que evitar las políticas aplicadas en Grecia, que son las que defienden la troika y Rajoy" @agarzon #GarzónTVE

@PPopular Las políticas aplicadas en Grecia son las de la troika. Las vuestras.

@CiudadanosCs @Albert_Rivera Y vosotros el del IBEX, y el de La Troika que ha llevado al pueblo Griego a la ruina. #falsos

Importantly, both the anti-austerity stance and the anti-elite position are often interconnected with a broader call for “taking sovereignty back”. Nevertheless, as we have already seen in the previous section with regard to the critical tweets sent by Podemos and Unidad Popular candidates, the concept of sovereignty is mobilized with different meanings: sovereignty shall in fact be taken back not only from EU institutions by national governments, but also by “the people” from any economic and political power perceived as not acting in citizens’ interest, national governments included:

Defender la patria es defender la soberanía de la gente y de los pueblos frente a la troika. #PatriaEresTú

"Nos jugamos que aquí gobierne la gente y no los mayordomos de Merkel" @MiguelUrban #AlcobendasSonrie <https://t.co/zLsTNVQxDq>

Es fundamental una Europa de derechos y soberanía #ObjetivoIglesias26J <https://t.co/sfZEftipyO>

"Si las políticas las marca la troika y no los gobernantes elegidos, estamos diciendo que no hay democracia" @agarzon #MontandoCampañAR

El #Brexit obliga a repensar la UE. Una Europa de la ciudadanía, con más democracia y solidaridad, poniendo en el centro la vida de la gente

Together with a more general claim against elites and anti-austerity policies for their being in conflict with the interests of “the people”, a more specific accusation is raised with regard to their acting against citizens from Southern European countries, as already noticed in the tweets from Podemos and IU:

"La deuda es una estafa generalizada contra los pueblos del sur de Europa" @MiguelUrban #CiudadLinealSonrie

"Hay que cambiar las políticas del UE que sólo sirven para empobrecer a los pueblos, sobre todo los del sur" @agarzon #RdPGarzónJerez

The link with people's sovereignty is also a constant in the *anti-globalization discourse* carried out by Spanish citizens during both elections, and mainly addressed against the TTIP. Also in this case, the “enemy” from which we need to take sovereignty back is identified not only in national and supranational political elites, but more generally in the *markets*, the interests of which are prevailing over those of the Spanish and European people(s):

.@ernesturtasun "Necesitamos Gobierno valiente q vaya a Bruselas y defienda a su gente y #NOalTTIP" #UnidasPodemos <https://t.co/YuT8Of0Y0u> 7

La UE, el TTIP y el CETA: ¿democracia o mercados? Con @LolaPodemos, un análisis crítico de la Europa que NO queremos <https://t.co/hMbuaDgbKr> 1

"El TTIP se basa en establecer un marco de comercio libre, multinacionales campan a sus anchas" @etorrespodemos <https://t.co/WuUiMnOD8P>

"Autogobierno es votar en contra del TTIP, que no nos roben el derecho a decidir sobre nuestro futuro y el de nuestra industria" @NaguaAlba

Lastly, during both the 2015 and the 2016 elections, citizens' express their

dismay for the management of the refugees' crisis, in relation to which the EU and the Spanish government are accused of lacking solidarity:

.@juralde Vamos a ir a Europa a decir que no queremos más políticas de austeridad y q somos solidarios, abramos las puertas a los refugiados

Contra la Europa xenófoba a la que le sangran las fronteras convirtamos la solidaridad en una #EuropaDeLosDerechos <https://t.co/s5ZSRcZVWa>

Ante una Europa enferma que levanta cuchillas en las fronteras, hoy queremos gritar dignidad en el #DíaMundialDeLosRefugiados. Bienvenid@s.

Brexit and the need for a different Europe

As we have seen in the previous sections, all criticisms advanced in the 2015 elections are still present during the 2016 electoral campaign. As in 2015, except for the more general anti-elitist claim, all the “core” issues that emerged from the debate are ultimately ascribable to two of our lines of conflict, criticizing the present market-making tendency of EU policy-making and its austerity policies that favour markets and depress the economies of Southern European countries, Spain included.

Nevertheless, as has already emerged in our analysis of leaders' tweets, although the tone and the accusations present in citizens' tweets are severe, at least the majority of them do not want an an “Expexit”, but a different, better, Europe, as the co-occurrence network in Figure 5.6 suggests: “building”, “solidarist”, “people”, “peoples”, “social rights”, “project”, “better”, “Union”, “humans” are all words associated with the European Union desired by Spanish critical citizens.

In most European countries, the occurrence of Brexit has likely raised a debate over EU membership, where leaders and citizens from different countries have expressed their concerns over the current state of the EU. While in several countries (France, Netherlands and Sweden most notably, but also Italy), some citizens and parties – especially from the “populist right” – have voiced their willingness to follow the UK example and to call for a referendum over EU

membership or monetary sovereignty, this is not the case of Spain:

Frente a la Europa de los mercaderes q empobrece a la gente, es necesario volver a la Europa de los ciudadanos q dignifique a las personas

Frente al #Brexit una amplia reforma en clave democrática y social de Europa es la mejor aportación q podemos lanzar desde el #Mediterráneo

¿Rectificarán esta dirección suicida de austeridad, desigualdad y xenofobia, o solo buscarán culpables y reafirmarán la euro retórica?

"El problema no es Europa. El problema es la derecha q lleva 15 años gobernándola" Ximo Puig dixit #UnSiPorElCambio <https://t.co/AVCGrexvwc>

Recuperemos la Europa justa, solidaria entre pueblos y cimentada en el respeto a los DDHH #DiaMundialdelosRefugiados <https://t.co/XctR6a38Ow>

On the contrary, as we can see from Figure 5.5 and from the examples of tweets reported above, Spanish citizens react to Brexit by calling for *more* and a *better* Europe: echoing the message of the “eurosceptic” leader of Podemos, nobody would desire to leave from a just and solidarist Europe.

Conclusion

In the concluding chapter of his book *Politicizing European Integration: struggling with the awakening giant*, where the author investigates in great detail EU politicization in six Western European countries, Hoeglenger (2016) summarizes as such his findings: “What have we learned about the politicization of European integration in Western Europe? In a nutshell, the crucial question is no longer whether European integration is being politicized, but to what extent and in which ways”. As discussed in the introduction to this work, our research starts from the same intuition, wondering *how* EU-related issues are politicized in domestic elections. To what extent do EU-related issues enter national electoral campaigns? Can debates over European integration, despite their complexity, be reduced to a relatively small number of dimensions? How is contestation over European integration related to the left-right cleavage that has characterized political life in Western Europe over the past century or more? These are the questions we aimed to answer to when we started our research on EU politicization.

The topic has been investigated through an in-depth case study on Spain, relying on data collected during the 2015 and 2016 Spanish electoral campaigns. As discussed, Spain represents an interesting case in which to investigate the dynamics of EU politicization for several reasons. First, Spain can be well included amongst the ‘new’ peripheral Southern European countries that have most suffered the effects of the sovereign-debt crisis, being one of the European countries hardest hit by the economic recession and having received special EU financial assistance in 2012 in order to recapitalize its banks. The unpopularity of the austerity measures implemented by the Spanish government upon EU request has deeply affected Spaniards’ trust and view of the EU, to the point where, between 2007 and 2013, Spain emerged as the European country in which the view that EU membership is a ‘good thing’ declined the most (to 47%, -26 percentage points; Eurobarometer 40 years, 2013). Second, Spanish parties and

public opinion have traditionally been more supportive and enthusiastic with regard to European integration than in most other European countries, as participation in the European project has been seen for a long time as a way to move the country towards better public policies and economic prosperity (Szmolka, 1999; Díez Medrano, 2003). Nevertheless, the traditional lack of party conflict over European integration has unwound since the rise of Podemos in 2014. The further growth of Podemos's electoral success, culminating in reaching 20.65% of the vote in the 2015 Spanish general elections, suggested that the anti-austerity claims for which the party is mouthpiece had gained significant ground amongst the public. Last but not least, while anti-austerity movements from the left have gained ground in recent years in Spain, political parties at the extreme right of the political spectrum are still extremely unsuccessful in the country - none of them has obtained more than one per cent of the total Spanish vote in any national election since 1980 (Alonso & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2015). This makes Spain an exception in a Europe in which right-wing Eurosceptic parties are playing an ever more relevant role in national political arenas. Taken together, these reasons make Spain an intriguing case for the investigation of EU politicization. On the one hand, the country has a long-term euro-enthusiastic tradition, and until recent years European integration represented a non-contentious issue both in terms of party conflict and with regard to public opinion. On the other hand, the 'honeymoon' between Spanish citizens and the EU has dramatically ended during the years of the crisis, as the rapid decrease in consensus about European integration registered by Eurobarometer and the astonishing success of Podemos demonstrate. Nevertheless, at least on the supply-side, the crisis has not resulted in a rise of parties from the 'populist radical right' - such as those elsewhere in Europe rallying against immigration and multiculturalism, supporting welfare chauvinism and tending to be at odds with the process of European integration (Mudde, 2007).

With regard to methods, in our work we have proposed a 'Twitter-based research design' to investigate EU politicization. Without implying that Internet-based data should substitute other data sources in the investigation of EU

politicization, we argue that social media data have opened up new, parallel avenues for politicization research that until now have been exploited only to a limited extent. On the one hand, the Internet - and social media in particular - represents in fact an unprecedented source of freely available, up-to-date data; on the other hand, the interactivity that characterizes Web 2.0 has enhanced two-ways forms of communication, which potentially allow for the investigation of the three different facets of EU politicization, namely: *salience*, *contentiousness* and *expansion to the public*. If the added value of relying on Twitter data might appear less pronounced with regard to the political elite - where sources such as party manifestos can allow for the parallel investigation of EU salience and contentiousness - social media analysis presents several advantages when investigating the salience and contentiousness of EU-related issues amongst the public(s). On Twitter we have in fact been able to collect huge amounts of data that have emerged as the result of citizens' will to freely express their opinions, and not as a reaction to pre-formulated questions as it happens in surveys, thus allowing for a less biased understanding of the salience of European integration.

To analyse such a great amount of textual data - about 4.5 million tweets across the two electoral campaigns - we have relied on different computer-assisted techniques. Most notably, for our analyses we have employed a semi-supervised machine learning approach based on Natural Language Processing technology, a technique that, combining approaches developed in the fields of computer science, applied mathematics and linguistics, allows researchers to train algorithms to automatically split and categorise tweets on the basis of the text they contain. If NLP has been incredibly helpful for the investigation of the *extent* of EU politicization, other techniques have been employed to answer other research questions. In particular, we found social network analysis a very useful tool for analysing the partisanship and the networked structure of 'critical citizens', while word co-occurrence networks have proven a simple but powerful instrument for identifying the main thematic clusters along which criticism towards European integration is rooted. Nevertheless, although the use of computer-assisted methods was essential for our research, we considered it important to support our

quantitative results with qualitative insights and understandings. Last but not least, when possible we have complemented our findings with recent survey results, kindly made available by the REScEU project.

Going back to our initial research question – how have EU-related issues been politicized in the last two rounds of Spanish elections - in our work we have disentangled the ‘how’ in question into three separate *nuclei* of questions regarding the extent, the content and the actors driving EU politicization in the Spanish context. In the next sections we summarize and problematize our main findings with regard to each of the three questions, to then conclude our work with suggestions for future research.

Main findings

Limited salience and high contentiousness: assessing the extent of EU politicization in the 2015 and 2016 Spanish general elections

The first objective of our work was to assess *the extent* to which EU-related issues have been politicized in the last two Spanish elections. In this regard, considering the characteristics of the Spanish context at the time of the elections, we considered Spain as a likely case in which politicization may occur. To measure EU politicization we have thus referred to the most acknowledged operationalization of the concept (Hoeglinger, 2016; Kriesi & Grande, 2014; De Wilde, 2011 amongst many others), which sees politicization as a threefold process that necessarily comprises: (a) an increased salience of the issue in the public debate (*salience*), (b) a process of polarization amongst the political elites carrying the issue-specific debate (*contentiousness*) and (c) an expansion of the issue-specific conflict to the general public (*expansion to the public*). In empirical terms, the salience of EU-related tweets has been determined by measuring the share of tweets dealing with European integration out of the total number of tweets sent during the election campaign, while to assess contentiousness we have compared the proportion of tweets critical towards the EU with the

proportion of tweets that are not critical (the closer the shares, the higher the contentiousness), normalized in a 0-1 *Contentiousness index*. In turn, the occurrence and extent of the expansion to the public has been measured by separately testing the salience and contentiousness of EU-related issues not only amongst tweets sent by the Spanish political elite, but also amongst those sent from the general public. As we expected EU-related issues to be politicized, we thus expected EU-related issues to be salient and contentious amongst both tweets sent by the Spanish political elite and those sent by the public(s). Our results, presented and discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, are summarized in the table below.

Year	Salience (% N tweets sent)		Contentiousness (0=maximum agreement; 1=maximum contentiousness)	
	Political elite	Citizens	Political elite	Citizens
December 2015	0.65	0.85	0.81	0.88
June 2016	3.03	4.32	0.81	0.91

Salience and Contentiousness of EU-related tweets. Summary of results.

From our findings we can draw three main conclusions on the extent of EU politicization in the cases under scrutiny. First, EU-related issues proved to be highly contentious, both amongst Spanish citizens and the Spanish political elite. The consensus that characterized the Spanish party system and public opinion for a long time has now vanished, and voters and politicians are now highly polarized with regard to European integration. Second, the extent of EU politicization is very similar between citizens and elites, in terms of both salience and contentiousness. As we stressed in Chapter 5, such a finding points to a high level of *political congruence* between the Spanish political elite and Spanish citizens with regard to European integration: a finding that gives rise to hope with regard to the translation into effective responsiveness, thus truly interlinking EU politicization and democratization. Third, contrary to our expectations, EU-related issues were of a limited salience in the 2015 electoral campaign while, although still not crucial, their importance significantly expanded in the 2016 electoral campaign.

Nevertheless, as we discussed in detail in Chapters 4 and 5, the higher salience of EU-related issues that emerged in the 2016 elections is not a consequence of an increased willingness to discuss European integration, but the result of the occurrence of Brexit. As the distribution of tweets over time suggests, external shocks such as the announcement of Brexit proved to deeply affect the extent to which issues related to European integration are debated on Twitter. Although this might not be surprising, the brevity and intensity of the peaks generated by this type of external events is blatant, and should be taken into account by social media researchers. Potentially, a campaign characterized by a moderate number of EU-related tweets sent each day and one characterized by a very low number of tweets during most of the days and an intense peak at a specific moment can in fact result, overall, in equal percentages of EU-related tweets, but the two scenarios would substantively be very different. The possibility of monitoring real-time online conversations could thus open up new ways not only of estimating the level of salience of EU-related issues, but also of understanding the mechanisms behind its increases and decreases.

As we discussed in Chapter 4, interpreting our salience results to ultimately answer the question “Have EU-related issues been salient in the Spanish debate?” is rather controversial, as there is an intrinsic challenge in determining a clear threshold in this regard and hence remaining in the framework of an in-depth case study. To overcome this limitation, we argue that future researches should privilege either longitudinal or comparative research designs, which, although not solving the problem (even if we discover that EU salience has increased over time, or that in a certain year it has been lower in Spain than in the UK, we would still not be able to say if EU-related issues are ultimately salient) would allow for a cross-time or cross-countries comparison.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, in an experimental attempt to investigate EU-salience in comparative terms in September 2016 we ran a test on nine European countries: Italy, Spain, Greece, France, Portugal, Germany, Poland, the UK and

the Netherlands (Arcostanzo & Pagano, 2016).⁷² From 14 to 20 September we collected tweets sent by the two most popular newspapers in each country according to Alexa rankings, and by the leaders and official accounts of every national political party who won at least one seat in the 2014 European parliamentary elections. Similar to our method for our research on the Spanish elections, we also included in our collection citizens' reactions – in the form of retweets and replies – to the tweets sent by their country's leaders, parties or newspapers. We then separated conversations on European matters from the rest of the data by scraping all tweets and isolating those containing at least one term from a list of EU-related keywords. Although the aforementioned study represents an experimental test and its results would need further validation, findings thus suggest that, despite their contentiousness, the salience of EU-related issues in Spain is lower than in most of the other European countries considered. Understanding the reasons behind such an international variation goes beyond the scope of our work. Nevertheless, we advance two hypotheses to be tested in future research with regard to supply-side factors that could have undermined the salience of EU-related issues in the public arena. On the one hand, as we discussed extensively in previous chapters and will stress in the next section, in Spain there is no successful right-wing populist Eurosceptic party calling for a Spain withdrawal from EU membership. On the other hand, whilst Podemos undoubtedly criticizes the current state of the EU, this party also does not focus its discourse mainly on EU-related issues, rather preferring to confront its national competitors on national matters. Taken together, these aspects could help to explain the limited salience of issues related to European integration in the last two rounds of Spanish national elections. At the same time, although the criticism to the EU advanced by Spanish citizens has significantly increased since the economic crisis, according to the results from the REScEU survey presented in Chapter 5 Spaniards still remain amongst the most pro-European citizens. Why

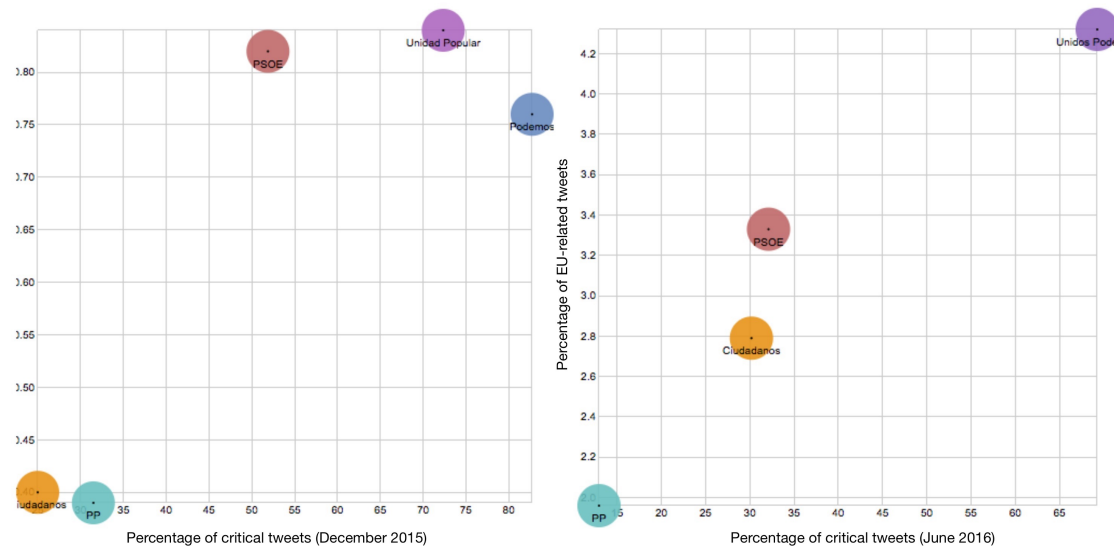
⁷² An article discussing the results of the test titled Notes on the Europeanization of Twitter, part II has been published on EuVisions.eu and is available at: <http://www.euvisions.eu/notes-europeanization-twitter-part/>

this is the case is another question, which would be important to investigate in future research.

Criticizing Europe from the left: the relationship between left-right positioning and EU politicization in today's Spain

A second aspect of EU politicization investigated in our research regards the relationship between left-right positioning and EU politicization in today's Spain. The academic literature on the topic has suggested the existence of an inverted-U curve describing pro-integration centrist parties and anti-integration peripheral parties (see Hooghe & Marks, 1999; Hooghe, Marks & Wilson, 2004 amongst many others). According to this view, both due to ideological reasons and competition incentives, parties at the extreme left and extreme right of the political spectrum would tend to be more critical towards the EU, while parties in the middle are generally much more supportive of European integration. Considering that parties deliberately choose to emphasize those issues that are favourable to them and de-emphasize unfavourable ones (Budge & Farlie, 1983; Petrocik, 1996 amongst many others), we expected candidates of parties with extreme ideological stances – namely, Podemos and Unidad Popular – (a) to make more use of tweets related to European integration and (b) to make more use of tweets that criticize the EU. Furthermore, according to the theory, moderate parties differ in their views of the EU when issues related to regulated capitalism enter debates over European integration. The centre-left supports political integration in order to create European-regulated capitalism with the capacity to regulate markets, redistribute resources, and sustain partnership among public and private actors, and the centre-right supports market integration but opposes policies, particularly concerning the environment, cohesion, or employment, that regulate capitalism. Because we expected the market-making vs. market-correcting line of conflict to be crucial in shaping Spanish discussing over European integration, and considering the present neo-liberal character of the EU, we further expected PSOE's candidates to be more willing to

discuss and criticize the current state of the EU than those of PP and Ciudadanos (but less than Podemos and Unidad Popular). Our findings are summarized in the scatter-plot below, where parties' positioning on the x axis is determined by their percentage of tweets critical of the EU, while their position on y axis is determined by the percentage of EU-related tweets of total tweets sent.



EU-related issues: salience and criticism at confrontation, 2015 and 2016

Considering together our results on the selective emphasis accorded by different parties to EU-related issues and their evaluative positioning, we can see that both our expectation of an increased salience of EU-related issues amongst parties located at the extreme of the political spectrum and that of a more critical stance adopted by peripheral parties appear to be confirmed. In line with our theoretical framework, the two dimensions turn out to be complementary: parties that are critical towards the EU – such as Unidad Popular and Podemos - not only tend to send an increased amount of EU-related tweets, but are also overall more likely to discuss EU-related issues. On the other hand, parties that are not willing to criticize the EU – such as PP and Ciudadanos – are not only less critical about the EU when discussing EU-related issues, but also tend to deemphasize issues related to European integration in their online discourse. Finally, the position of PSOE is rather interesting, as it is the only party whose discourse moved, from being slightly critical in 2015 to significantly more supportive in 2016. In Chapter 4

we suggested an interpretation of such a positional change, based on strategic and ideological reasons. On the one hand, while during the 2015 elections debates over European integration were mainly focused on austerity policies, toward which PSOE's criticism was addressed, in 2016 the occurrence of Brexit shifted the focus to EU membership, of which PSOE is a strong supporter. On the other hand, while in 2015 the increased importance and increased level of criticism accorded by Podemos and Unidad Popular to EU-related issues forced PSOE to adopt a stance more critical of the current state European integration in order to distance itself from the pro-European and "Merkel's ally" PP, in 2016 the party was rather encouraged to take advantage of Brexit to attack Podemos for its populist character and lack of responsibility, with the complicity of a favourable climate of opinion.

Together with our analysis of the selective emphasis and criticism accorded by the Spanish political elite to EU-related issues, in our work we have investigated as well the political positioning and partisanship of Spanish critical citizens. To understand such a relationship we proceeded in two ways: first we re-created the retweet network of Spanish critical citizens in order to understand around which political parties they are clustered; second we relied on survey data to understand the political self-placement of Spanish 'hard eurosceptics', i.e. those citizens who would vote for Spain to exit the EU in a possible referendum on EU membership. In both cases, Spanish EU-critical citizens turned out to be supporters of Unidos Podemos and located at the extreme-left of the political spectrum. Such a finding is particularly interesting especially if understood in a comparative perspective, as the Spanish result goes in the opposite direction of other EU countries included in the REScEU survey: while in Spain 'leavers' are mainly located at the extreme-left of the political spectrum, the opposite is true in France, Germany, Italy and Poland, where the percentage of leavers is, on the contrary, higher at the extreme-right of the political spectrum.

Ultimately, Spanish euroscepticism is confirmed as an exception, at least if compared to the other five countries included in our survey. Not only are Spaniards, overall, less likely to vote "leave" in a referendum on EU membership,

but, in contrast to what happens in other countries – where leavers are mainly located at the extreme-right of the political spectrum - Spanish leavers belong to the extreme-left of the political spectrum. According to our results Spanish ‘hard eurosceptics’ are thus not right-wing citizens constrained to vote PP by the lack of far-right Eurosceptic parties, but rather represent an ‘extreme’ fringe of Podemos’ voters.

For a more solidarist Europe: disentangling Spanish citizens’ and leaders’ criticisms of European integration

Finally, our work provides an extensive examination of the ‘critical issues’ in reason of which the EU is criticized. As discussed when presenting our theoretical framework in Chapter 1, we expected conflicts over European integration to be ultimately structured around four lines of conflict: (a) a left-right cleavage at the supranational level, opposing market-making and market-correcting policy preferences at the EU level (*market-making vs. market-correcting*); (b) a conflict opposing core and peripheral member states, and first and foremost payers and beneficiaries of cross-national transfers (*core vs. periphery*); (c) a tension opposing free movement and national closure, which becomes relevant with regard to the issue of intra-EU mobility between high-welfare and low-welfare member states (*free movement vs. national closure*); and finally (d) an integration-autonomy conflict, where the defence of national social sovereignty is in contrast with the increased role of EU conditionality (*integration vs. autonomy*). In this regard, in our work we have investigated to what extent the critical issues that emerged in the online debate were ultimately ascribable to the four outlined lines of conflict. In particular, in the case of Spain our expectations were that the first, second and fourth conflicts would play an important role in shaping criticisms over European integration, while we had reason to believe that intra-EU mobility is not perceived at the moment as a core issue to address by the Spanish political elite nor by the Spanish public, also considering the lack of right-wing Eurosceptic parties.

To answer this question, we proceeded with a two-step analysis, first

identifying the critical issues emerging in the online debate – with regard, respectively, to the Spanish political elite and its public(s) - and second analytically interpreting the issues that emerged in the light of our four lines of conflict. Starting with the political elite, we have seen how most criticism advanced towards the EU during the 2015 and 2016 Spanish elections came from Podemos or Unidad Popular, who represented by far the most critical parties with regard to European integration. As discussed in Chapter 4, Podemos and IU criticized the EU in respect to several issues, amongst which austerity stands out most notably. By going through all the tweets sent by the parties in the two campaigns we have identified two main critical discourses. These were, in order of importance, an attack on the “anti-solidarity” character of the present EU, and a call for “taking sovereignty back”. By breaking down these two macro-issues into all their facets we were able to identify the various articulations in which the concepts of solidarity and sovereignty were employed and articulated in reference to different actors. On the one hand, candidates from these parties considered the present EU to lack solidarity regarding several subjects: towards its *people*, who are suffering and paying the costs of a crisis that had not been caused by them; towards *Southern European countries*, which are left behind by European policy-making that acts in the exclusive interest of the “core” – identified with Germany, in particular – to the detriment of Southern European countries, and especially Greece; and finally towards *refugees*, who are disgracefully left at its doors. On the other hand, the concept of “sovereignty” is also used with different meanings: sovereignty shall in fact be taken back not only from EU institutions, which are illegitimately limiting the power of democratically elected national governments, but from *any* power that is acting against the interests of *the people*: banks, multinationals and traditional political elites at any political level. As discussed, the criticism advanced in the tweets of Podemos and Unidad Popular is severe and not trivial, but it would be wrong to depict the two parties as hard eurosceptics. As much as they criticize the current state of the EU, in fact, they never express any preference in favour of an *Espexit*, but always call for a *different* project for the EU: ultimately, a more democratic and people-oriented European Union, one in line with its own founding

principles.

Moving to critical citizens, the visualization of critical tweets' word-to-word co-occurrence networks allowed us to distinguish four main types of criticism advanced by Spanish citizens towards the EU during the 2015 electoral campaign. The first is a *broad anti-globalization discourse* against CETA, TTIP and multinational companies in general; second, an *anti-austerity* protest, which is addressed both at the national - against cuts to public spending and fiscal compact - and at the European levels; third, an *anti-elite position*, challenging both the national government and the 'technocratic elites' at the EU level; and finally a *negative judgment of the management of the refugee crisis*, articulated both at the national and the European levels and highly inter-connected with anti-elite positions. The same claims emerged during the 2016 elections, but this time they were placed side by side with a more general discourse on "the Europe that we want", boosted by the simultaneous occurrence of Brexit. Importantly, and differently from other European countries (France, Netherlands and Sweden most notably, but also Italy), where some citizens and parties – especially from the 'populist radical right' – have reacted to the announcement of Brexit by voicing their willingness to follow the UK's example and to call for a referendum over EU membership or monetary sovereignty, this was not the case in Spain. Spanish citizens reacted in fact to Brexit mainly by calling for *more* and a *better* Europe: echoing the message of the 'Eurosceptic' leader of Podemos, they claimed nobody would desire to leave a just and solidarist Europe.

In all their complexity, the criticisms that emerged from our analysis of Spanish critical tweets – both those sent from the Spanish political elite, and those from citizens - can easily be attributable to our four lines of conflict. In line with their left-wing political self-placement, critical citizens and parties in fact strongly position themselves in favour of market-correcting policies both at the national and at the European level. At the same time they highly emphasize the existence of unfair core-periphery dynamics that favour the German core over Southern European countries, as the main objects of criticism are the demands for fiscal retrenchment, the policy of austerity and the consequent social and political costs,

in regards to which the EU is often accused of showing a lack of solidarity. By contrast, in line with our expectations and with the results of the REScEU survey presented in Chapter 2, intra-EU mobility does not appear as a critical issue in Spain: not only is discussion over the legitimacy of opening the Spanish labour market and social benefits to European citizens not challenged, but also ‘free movement’ is invoked in reference to the management of the refugee crisis. Finally, positioning along the integration-autonomy line of conflict is more controversial: if a general call for ‘taking sovereignty back’ is a distinctive trait of critical citizens’ and parties’ online discourse, such a general claim does not translate automatically into a desire for *less* Europe, but rather into a need for a *different* European Union.

Conclusion

The aim of our work was threefold. Firstly, it aimed at providing a comprehensive understanding of the type, directionality and intensity of conflicts over European integration in present times in Spain, both at the level of the political elite and at that of the public. Secondly, it had the intention of empirically verifying the assumptions and findings of the literature on EU politicization in relation to the case under scrutiny. Third, it had the purpose of introducing and testing an innovative method for the study of issue politicization on Twitter-based communication that combines NLP technology, network analysis and qualitative content analysis.

In line with the aforementioned intentions, with our work we have contributed to the existing literature on EU politicization by providing in-depth insights into the extent and ways in which European integration was politicized during the 2015 and 2016 Spanish general elections. At the same time, we have proposed an innovative approach for the investigation of EU politicization starting from publicly available large-scale Twitter data that has the advantage of allowing comparative research since it can be easily applied to other countries or to other time frames.

Further research relying on Twitter data may consider, on the one hand, privileging comparative research designs. In this way it will be possible to verify whether the low salience of EU-related issues that emerged in our analysis is indeed a peculiarity of the present Spanish context, or rather a pattern involving all European countries, or even a commonality among a specific group of countries. On the other hand, relying on longitudinal data would allow the temporal dynamics behind the phenomenon of EU politicization to be better reconstructed. More specifically, it would allow us to investigate whether the salience of EU-related issues, although remaining low compared to other national issues, is slowly increasing over time - as suggested by the existing literature on traditional media (Boomgarden et al., 2010; Schuck et al., 2011) – or, on the contrary, its evolution does not follow a linear but rather a cyclical trend conditioned by external events (Steenbergen & Scott, 2004; Netjes & Binnema, 2007; Guineadeau & Palau, 2016). Finally, a comparison between Twitter data and other data sources – such as traditional media, party manifestos and public opinion surveys – would allow us to validate the generalizability of our results and to compare degrees and dynamics of EU politicization in different research contexts, in the attempt to unify a still fragmented research agenda.

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